

GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
ARCHÆOLOGICAL SURVEY OF INDIA
ARCHÆOLOGICAL
LIBRARY

ACCESSION NO. 230~~4~~23

CALL No. 701.180954/Sol

~~D 1353(a)~~

23023

THE CHARM OF
INDIAN ART

[Handwritten signature]

A TIBETAN ON TIBET

By GEORGE COMBE, C.B.E.

10s. net.

A Tibetan on Tibet should appeal not only to the theologian and the sociologist, but to "the man in the street," who will find a remarkable human document in the story. For the first time we get an account from the inside of the manner and customs of the Tibetans and the nomad tribes, and in the concluding chapter we are initiated into the meaning and significance of the famous Devil Dance.

T. FISHER UNWIN LTD LONDON W.C.



HASTE THOU, APPIVED, O BEAUTIFUL ONE, TO ME.

THE END.

735

THE CHARM OF INDIAN ART . *By*

W. E. GLADSTONE SOLOMON

PRINCIPAL, SIR J. J. SCHOOL OF ART, BOMBAY,
CURATOR, ART SECTION, PRINCE OF WALES MUSEUM,
BOMBAY. AUTHOR OF "THE BOMBAY REVIVAL OF
INDIAN ART," "JOTTINGS AT AJANTA," ETC., ETC.

ILLUSTRATED

~~1855 (G)~~

T. FISHER UNWIN LTD
LONDON: ADELPHI TERRACE

E 1003
212/54

First published in 1926

(All rights reserved)

Acc. No. 23023
Date. 21. 3. 56.
Call No. 701.180954/501

*I dreamed I trod the marge of India's plain :
Adown the sky
The giddy peak shook stars like golden rain ;
The writhing glacier groaned in mortal pain
Of ecstasy,
Beneath the feet of THOSE whose footprints blanche
The mountain tops to spectral white, and stanch
The fall in frozen awe ; doom the young branch
To smile and die :
Whose Messenger, the leaping avalanche ;—*

*Whose toys, the precipice, the pine, the peak,
The loosened rock
Hurtling from cliff to cliff in frenzied freak :
Whose chasm-echoed laughter is the shriek
When Whirlwinds mock :
THOSE who unfurl the awnings of the sky
To canopy their cloudy conclave high ;
Who the dread mandate utter audibly
In thunder shock,—
And punish when the livid lightnings fly !*

*Then fell a formless whisper,—“ Who art thou ? ”
And, lying prone,
I trembling answered, “ By the peerless brow
Of Umâ the Effulgent I avow
I come alone !
Driven by none's command, the way so long
Have I—an Alien—trod, wracked by no wrong,
But seeking truth, impelled by Love the Strong.
Must I atone,
Who followed but the cadence of Thy Song ? ”*

*Now (as I lay) the voice within my heart
Breathed, "BE THOU WISE!"
Then grew the Song, and spread wide wings apart
That bore me upward, swiftly as the dart
Of Kâmadeva flies!
From vale and sable forest, crag, and slide
The music mounted; all Earth's creatures vied,
Pæaning the great praise from every side;
And centuries
Of the sweet-tongued Gandharvâs swelled the tide.*

*Till, floating on that fugue, my heart grew light;—
I bent my gaze
To view the abyss, the vale, the hoary height
Blushed o'er with Flowers;—vanished was the Night
In golden haze;
While lotus-decked the glaciers, passing fair,
Sped prayer-like perfumes on the fainting air,
As from the fold of Shree's ambrosial hair.
—O, wild amaze:—
Incarnate Beauty's Self sat thronéd there!*

*Yea, bowered by the flowering ice was SHE,
—Great India's Queen—
Lapped in her awful loveliness:—Ah, me!
The bliss—the joy—the whelming Majesty
That I have seen!
The message of her golden eyes did pour
Infinite wisdom o'er my Soul.—No more!
Come Brothers, East and West,—Come ye, adore,
With reverent mien,
HER that yet reigneth as SHE reigned of Yore!*

PREFACE

ONE OF THE ESSAYS in this volume has been published in India. "The Women of the Ajanta Caves" appeared in pamphlet form in 1923. The remaining essays are now published for the first time. The diagrams, of which there are twenty-two different examples, are drawings of the "Rângolis" or sand-pictures of the Pâthâre Prabhu Women. With regard to the stories contained in the essay entitled "The Worshippers of Beauty" it may be mentioned that these were written down as nearly as possible as they were told to me by Indian friends. The slight differences in the form of the story of Savitri seem to my mind rather to increase than diminish its interest, since that is the way this ancient tale was repeated to me. The Cobra story, and the story of "Mother's Day," in the same essay, may also differ considerably from the somewhat similar stories of other Hindu Castes, as all these tales and many of the customs described are the special household property of the Pâthâre Prabhus.

I would take this opportunity of thanking Mr.

PREFACE

M. V. Dhurandhar and other illustrators of this volume, and Sir John Marshall, Director-General of Archæology in India, for his kindness in providing me with the photographs of Sanchi. I also acknowledge gratefully the facilities for study at Ajanta, Ellora, and Sanchi accorded to me by Mr. A. Hydari and the hospitable representatives of His Exalted Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad and Her Highness the Begum of Bhopal.

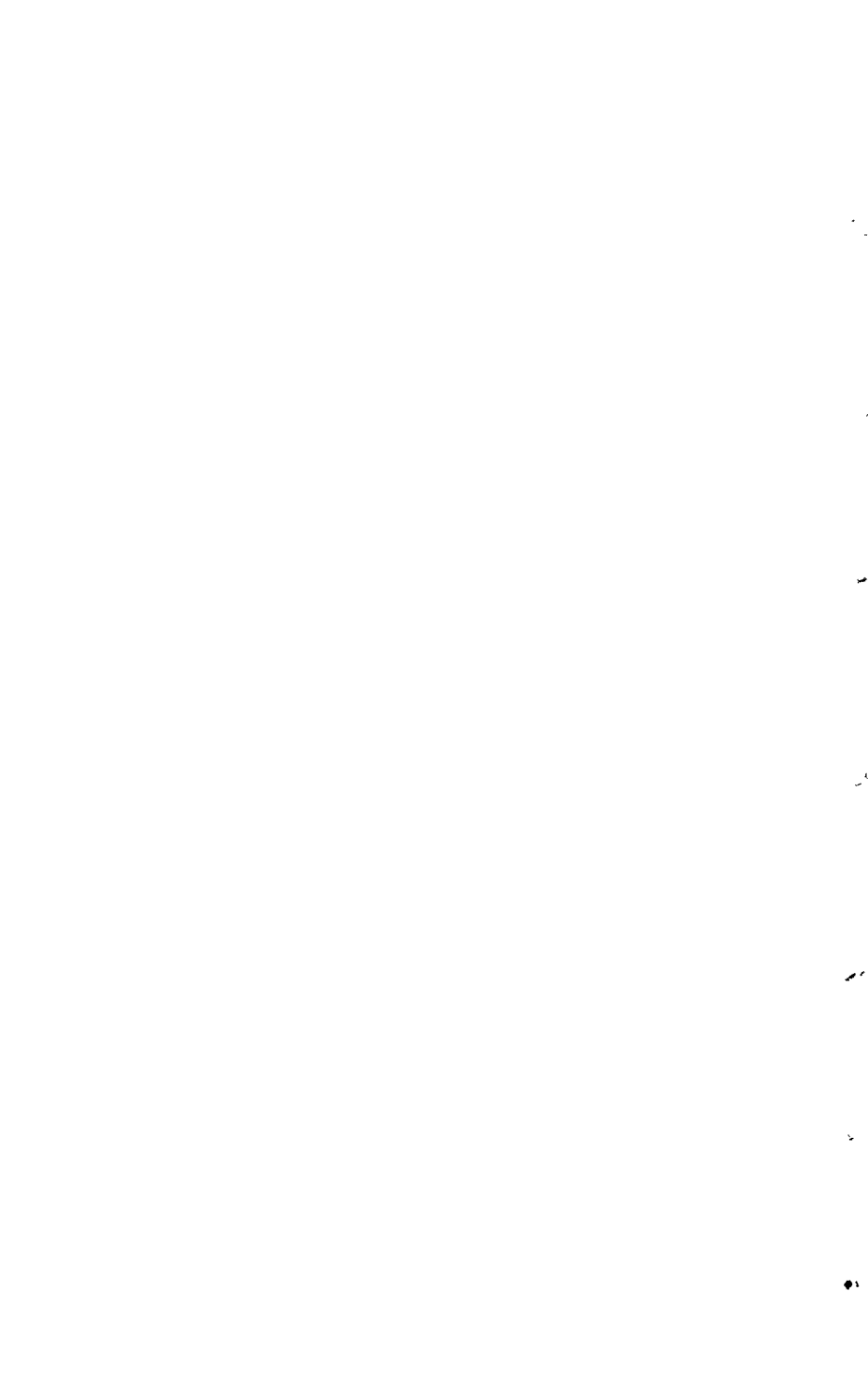
W.E.G.S.

BOMBAY,

October 8, 1925.

CONTENTS

| | PAGE |
|---|------|
| PREFACE | 7 |
| INTRODUCTION | 13 |
| THE WOMEN OF THE AJANTA CAVES . . | 23 |
| THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY (A study of the Pâthâre Prabhu Caste)— | |
| I. THE PRABHU SAGA | 41 |
| II. ART AND IMMORTALITY | 49 |
| III. THE PRIESTESS OF THE SHRINE | 55 |
| IV. PICTURES AND STORIES | 65 |
| V. THE GIFT OF PERPETUAL YOUTH | 76 |
| SANCHI AND THE INDIAN VIEW-POINT IN ART | 83 |
| THE INDIAN ART STUDENT— | |
| I. AS THE INTERPRETER | 99 |
| II. AS THE HUMORIST | 108 |
| III. AS THE SUPERHUMAN REALIST | 115 |
| APPENDIX | 125 |



ILLUSTRATIONS

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| "HAST THOU ARRIVED, O BEAUTIFUL ONE?" | <i>Frontispiece</i> |
| <i>By M. V. Dhurandhar</i> | |
| FROM A PANEL IN THE AJANTA CAVES | FACING PAGE 34 |
| <i>By A. A. Bhonsale</i> | |
| A PRABHU GIRL DRAWING A RÂNGOLI | 59 |
| <i>By the Author</i> | |
| PICTURES PAINTED ON THE LACQUERED BOARDS FOR "NAG- PANCHAMI" | 69 |
| <i>By M. V. Dhurandhar</i> | |
| A PRABHU GIRL PAINTING A DECORATIVE PANEL | 77 |
| <i>By the Author</i> | |
| THE EASTERN GATE, SANCHI | 89 |
| THE EASTERN GATE, SANCHI | 92 |
| DIAGRAMS OF RÂNGOLI PICTURES | 100 |
| DIAGRAMS OF RÂNGOLI PICTURES | 104 |
| STUDY FOR AN APSARÂ | 121 |
| <i>By J. M. Ahirvasi</i> | |
| THE IMAGE OF GAURI ENTHRONED | 139 |
| <i>Photo by M. N. Kirtikar</i> | |

INTRODUCTION

22

INTRODUCTION

I HAVE A FRIEND IN a distant land—a young land—who had never seen India. He had manifested no particular bent for Art except that respect for it which few reading men are without, and his conceptions of it were scholarly and Hellenistic to the core. He had from time to time snatched sudden intervals for travel from the maw of an exacting profession; and glimpses of the Nearer East—the Levant—Italy—had not perceptibly disturbed a point of view probably fostered by some respected tutor at College. These Eastern and European passages were seen by him through the lens of a keenly cultivated historical sense. One day this friend wrote to me that he was wishful of a holiday,—which implied a sea-voyage of course;—but what at the end of that he wondered. I cabled, “Why not try India?” So he tried India, and with him came his wife. Their arrival I remember well. I had not seen my friend for over twelve years. It is one of the untaxed advantages of living in Bombay that it gives one the opportunity of meeting

INTRODUCTION

friends flying to, or fleeing from, India's Gateway. Either way one can catch them in passing. These two visitors dropped as it were upon my lawn; and the old sophisticated trees bent to their freshness, and murmured a welcome that was like a *salaam*. India had evidently greeted the newcomers with Indian politeness, for they were intent, baby-eyed with wonder. "What a delightful place!" they said. At once they concentrated upon India. Unappalled by the vastness of the new field—they started to read; and during the few days of their stay (for Bombay was to be only the starting-point of their travels) parcels were frequently arriving from the booksellers. I remember some of the items on this literary bill of fare. There were Kipling's *Kim*—and two volumes of his Indian tales; and, following these *hors d'œuvres variés*, certain volumes of *Clive*, *Dupleix*, *Akbar*, *Mountstuart Elphinstone*, and other of the Indian hierarchy. Tod's *Annals of Rajasthan* made a solid portion of the meal, flanked by sundry political or quasi-political trifles. Several books on Indian Art and some of Tagore's works were the sweets and savouries, and Fergusson the fragrant was a good liqueur brandy. My friends read, noted, particularised, methodised, and now and then even ambled tentatively along the mazes of "Dyarchy" and "Swaraj." They made lists of things they

INTRODUCTION

required for the journey, and for their house overseas; and while often explaining that they "were not going to be in a hurry to buy anything," deposited the concrete results of this prudent resolution in growing numbers in my go-down. We discussed their plans. It was settled that they were to see India—but the choice was so wide. Where should they go? Everywhere, of course. They ticked off the names of places that seemed to mean "India" and wrought diligently with pencil and paper. They held mysterious conferences with agents across the office counter, and with friends across the dinner-table—who all gave different advice. One day a portentous typed document was introduced; the Itinerary was at last in being! I persuaded them to allot their last week to me on the way back, and they started.

The telegraph kept me in touch with the travelers, and I followed their wanderings on the large map of India in my room. They must have altered that Itinerary a dozen times; in fact, as I afterwards heard, it had been overhauled and revised by competent experts at almost every halting-place. The telegrams were satisfactory—"Ahmedabad delightful," "Agra magnificent"; and again, "Have just seen Kinchinganga, wonderful experience." Postal parcels addressed to themselves punctuated the artistic points of

INTRODUCTION

progress, and were duly added to the rising collection in the go-down. In spite of this, when they came back it was with augmented luggage and radiant faces. All fears as to their possible disillusionment were instantly dispelled,—their eyes shone with the wonders they had seen. India will probably always be a City of Refuge to some—and a City of Destruction to others. These two who were of the former category talked of their travels with awe and enthusiasm. India and Indian Art had secured new votaries, so I introduced the converts to the Indian artists of my acquaintance. There are devotees of India's art who somehow miss meeting her artists, and Indian Art can probably be best understood by contact with the living instruments for its expression. A new feature now began to be added to the Art Section of the go-down. They bought pictures. The days before they went away were crowded ones, and the kindness of Indian friends was the crowning felicity. “What extraordinarily *polite* people!” exclaimed these two children of a cruder land.

The day came when the go-down had to give up its now considerable collection, and there was a great writing-out of final instructions as to how certain books and articles still in the hands of the vendors were to be sent when these materialised. So my friends departed, and left the bungalow

18

INTRODUCTION

disconsolate enough. The palms seemed to lay their heads together and to start their secret whispering again; the burden of weighty secrets pressed once more upon the old banyan trees; the compound cloaked itself again with reticence.

One wireless from the wide sea—and the void was complete. Several weeks elapsed, for the voyage was a long one, before the vacuum of absence was broken by a breath as of distant breezes. The letter told little of the voyage, and the safe home-coming of the taking up again of the daily work, or the meeting of old friends. But the writer said :

“India has thoroughly awakened my feeling for pictures which I suppose lay dormant within me and only needed the quickening touch. The touch has done its work and my eye seems open to colour, which now moves me in a way it has never done heretofore. The two Mughal pictures hang in their lacquer frames in our drawing-room, and are admired by everybody. Even Clifford (our lawyer) who dined with us last night, and who I never credited with an appreciation of painting, enthused over them. It is a habit with me to look at these daily and they always give me a thrill of pleasure. The charming water-colour from Bengal hangs in a gilt rim with a two-inch white mount, as the artist prescribed, in our hall and has also been much admired. The head of

INTRODUCTION

the Mahratta girl in oils, with orange and crimson as the dominating colours, faces my bed and delights me every morning, and the last thing at night. The Lahore water-colours and the other sketches are still in the picture-framer's hands. . . . You cannot think what pleasure these things are to me, and it is India to which I owe this awakened faculty of appreciation. My carpet is not the failure I feared. Harvey—who was in the Indian Army at one time, and whom I like immensely because he cannot say enough of the interest he found in India, and has travelled all over it—declares it to be good. He was quite enamoured of the Baroda chair and the lamp from Bombay. I am truly surprised to find how general among our friends here is the capacity of appreciating India, and how many people who know a little about it are sensible of its amazing interest. This is I fear a letter on one theme only, and a trite one to you, which serves only to reveal how primitive I am in matters artistic—but it is better that I should start late than never ! Alas ! I am 55 to-day ! ”

Such is India's tribute from the Countries where History, Art, and Music are not yet ; where Yesterday is forgotten, and To-morrow unknown ; but where it is always To-day, and abounding Hope, and Youth !

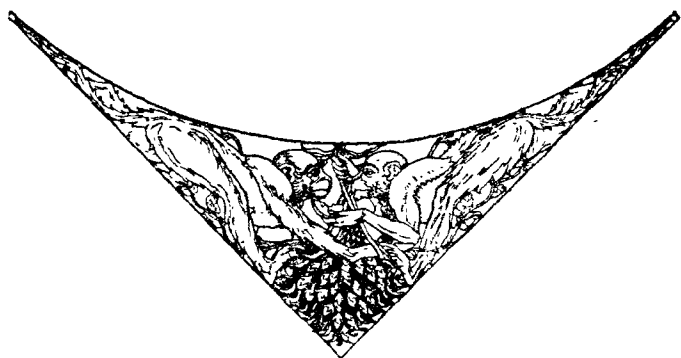
These slight essays will have been justified if

INTRODUCTION

they convey to some who crave for a stiller beauty than the bustling West affords, a faint breath of exotic perfumes as sweet as that lavender which our charming great-grandmothers used to fold so lovingly between the leaves of their Bibles. Those who have once breathed the scent of far-off Indian lotus-fields will not rest content until they have gathered some of those flowers that can make life fragrant. To thousands of people India comes like a magician who has power to open the eyes of the blind. Henceforth wherever their lot may be cast they carry within themselves a remembrance of colour and romance that can enrich even the most prosaic moments of existence. *O, Goddess, foam-engendered ! Thou that sittest upon white lotuses ; whose splendour is like a continuous blaze of lightning ; from whose form the fragrance of the lotus extendeth eight hundred miles,—pardon our perplexities, compassionate our ignorance, unveil our eyes !*

*THE WOMEN OF THE
AJANTA CAVES*

Before we started to climb the hillside to the caves an Indian friend presented me with a blossom he had picked and which abounds at Ajanta. It is a little yellow flower of a bright gamboge tint, with white petals, and possesses for the Hindus a deep religious meaning. They say that this flower was grown by Satyabhâmâ in her garden, and was coveted by Rukmini, Queen of Heaven. She had a "scene" with her celestial spouse, Krishna, whom she accused of having given to another the beautiful plant that ought to have been hers. Krishna immediately gave Rukmini a whole gardenful of these flowers, thereby allaying the dispute and also (though this may not be the orthodox moral of the story) setting an example of husbandly compliance very useful to mere mortals. The flower is widely known by its Marathi name of "Pârijâtak," but still more widely by its Hindi appellation of "Har Singour." It sweetens the month of September at Ajanta, where it blooms in profusion all over the valley. The Hindus say that the plant is the guardian of the caves, whose miraculous existence to-day is due to its sacred efficacy.



THE WOMEN OF THE AJANTA CAVES

THE SITUATION OF AJANTA is the best explanation of its wondrous works. The men, who could conceive the idea of that tremendous scimitar of columned temples athwart the face of the precipice, four furlongs from the boss of the hilt to the point of the blade, were Titans in conception and energy.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The cliff sweeps downward to the valley in a double cascade of volcanic rock, topped with a soft curling spume of greenery, and vanishing into verdant brake, and coppice below. This rock wave is punctured with the human eyries of the monks, fit habitations indeed for those soaring spirits. From the great half-moon gallery that connects the temples, one looks across the vale and serpentine river upon opposing crags that seem to heave and billow with superabundant

THE WOMEN OF THE AJANTA CAVES

green. The head of the crescent swings southward in its full curve and is closed by a huge buttress of perpendicular rock down a chasm of which the river tumbles in a light cascade.¹ The wave-like hills are here and there broken by tall splintered rocks that tower in stern contrast above the verdure. But this greenness has clung, and crept, climbed, and crawled, and at last conquered almost every cranny and crevice of the landscape. The greenness of Ajanta seems fraught with tenderness. It is Love the beautifier, who presses a vernal kiss even on the forbidding lip of the precipice.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I like to think of the artist-monks in the cool of the early evening, brushes and palettes laid aside, conversing with one another about the day's work while they paced the galleries. They would group themselves, I think, somewhere near the seventeenth cave (that with the wonderful view), and exchange with quiet interest the news of the day's work. This man would show, perhaps with a trace of pardonable exultation, his drawing of a rounded arm and shoulder, or a tinted study of a lovely half-averted face, or a sketch for a central point of the composition,—a headdress perhaps, that was in itself a little mine of decorative art.

One by one they would show their sketches,

¹ The cascade is dry in the hot weather.

THE WOMEN OF THE AJANTA CAVES

and commune together in low voices, of their hopes, their fears, their technical difficulties, their ambitions for the progress of the great work. And then amongst the group appears the Master, a calm, white-robed figure of tranquil brow, with wistful, rather tired eyes. He looks at the drawings and speaks a word, here of sober praise, there of exhortation to further diligence, perhaps now and then a syllable of gentle reproof. . . . Lastly, he turns to his brother artists, and utters only the Ineffable Name.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

After four o'clock the sun visits the First and the Second Caves with his glow. Then is the time to see their treasures. As the afternoon wears on, the old walls seem to awaken from slumber and to rouse and preen themselves with something of their former pride. Now, one by one, emerge in a kind of dark glory forms that are poems, colours that are melodies. Now we can see that life-like study of the maiden tending her hair, and that other dark-skinned beauty leaning in careless *abandon* against the pillar, as she has stood for far more than a thousand years; as she stands to-day in many a village of the Mahratta Land.

The glow that reanimates the paintings is but the very faintest revival of a Past of Glory. It is

THE WOMEN OF THE AJANTA CAVES

no more than the single tinselled star that remained to Hans Anderson's Fir-tree when its dream was past ; yet it shows these surely sentient walls to be still what once they were, Aristocrats of Art. . . .

And all this was accomplished with five colours only—five colours—and a Line !

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Around Ajanta there always hangs a chastened and appropriate quietness. But the still hour is that when the Caves are plunged in the shadows of approaching twilight ; when the hill-crests only are lit with flame. The monkeys have long since withdrawn to their rest. A single vulture stoops for a moment over the abyss, wheels, and seeks her eyrie in the unscalable crag above. The mists curdle and become denser in the valley—the night seems to lift herself visibly from her bed, upon purple pinions. It is a moment when Nature seems hushed in tremulous expectancy ; and now for a brief second the Past and Present will surely join hands.

We lean upon the parapet and the air is filled with rustlings as remote as the voice of thought itself ; delicate phantasms shape themselves in our consciousness. Oh ! to be one with all this oneness, to catch a syllable of Truth from the voices that environ : a single star—the emblem—brightens overhead. Lean low—lower yet, until the beating

30

THE WOMEN OF THE AJANTA CAVES

of that deathless heart shall quicken our souls.
For this is India's hour ;—Hush !—She speaks.

* * * * *

Seated on the threshold of the seventeenth cave under the far-projecting eaves of virgin rock, I gazed at the great cliff opposite. From this vantage-point one can see the waterfall. The sun now getting low had thrown the rugged eastern angle of the valley into shadow, but its light hung like a great ruby upon the broad bosom of the cliff. Far beneath, at the cavernous base of the rock, the river had a tarn-like look, so turbid and slow flowed the current. Across its unruffled surface was drawn a gleam like a dagger blade of jade. As I eyed, I found myself speaking aloud the words "Majesty and Power". The action was a subconscious one. I do not know how these words formed in my mind, nor why I uttered them ; but I am sure that the syllables were forged by something more subtle than chance, by some impression in a remote brain cell which worked responsive to the influences, both external and viewless, of my surroundings.

In the sixteenth cave is a panel usually called "The Dying Princess". It shows the drooping form of a woman attended by other women, and the composition has a rhythmic flow of line that well conveys the poignant story. The unbound hair of the Princess that hangs over her shoulder,

THE WOMEN OF THE AJANTA CAVES

contrasting with the elaborate headgear of her attendants, was a good idea of the artist's, and serves to enhance the lines of lassitude. This woman is beautiful, like all the women of the Ajanta paintings. The needful expression is conveyed in the pose of the figure. That calm face the artist would not mar with unwanted realism, lest we should forget that we were onlookers of the most cruel of all human tragedies, the death of a beautiful woman. A very similar scene is treated quite differently in the seventeenth cave, where a Queen sick unto death reclines upon the broad and anxious breast of her royal husband. Here too the exquisite face, the lovely form are painted by the artist in all their rich perfections. To have sacrificed these essentials for a meretricious delineation of the ravages of illness, or the agonies of approaching dissolution, would have been to have sacrificed everything. Artists thought rightly in those days ; and just as our Masters of Fiction are judged by general consent to prove their greatness according to their power of presenting women, so by their paintings of women the Masters of Ajanta have justified their title to Mastership. Burne-Jones painted his figures with expressionless faces, and thereby followed the example of the best Greek Sculpture. I think that he sacrificed too much by so strict a convention, and doubt very much whether Polygnotus or

THE WOMEN OF THE AJANTA CAVES

Apelles would have approved of it. Such bondage to any convention would have been foreign to the whole spirit of the Indian Painters, whose art at Ajanta is a free and joyous art, unshackled and light as the air. It was something far rarer, far more *difficult* (if one may use so crude an explanation) that prevented them from making their women unbeautiful for any reason or cause whatsoever—it was Taste. Whatever other standards of beauty may exist outside the human species, for normal Man, Woman must always represent the most decorative element in the world. The Ajanta Masters use Woman as their best decorative asset with brilliant zest and extraordinary knowledge. Woman is the finest achievement of their art, and obviously its most admired theme. They cannot apparently have too much of her, and introduce her on every possible occasion, whether relevant to the story or otherwise, in every possible way, but under one aspect only—that of beauty. They use women like flowers : garlands of girls surround their Rajas and their Princes, embellish their palaces, dominate their street scenes, crowd the windows of their cities, and are often painted, as in the delicious panel in the First Cave of the Queen and her maids giving alms to a mendicant, for the sheer joy of painting them, and with no perceivable literary or religious intention. When they do not weave their women into garlands,

THE WOMEN OF THE AJANTA CAVES

these artists scatter them as single blooms, or by twos and threes over the walls. As Apsarâs or radiant Peris, they float across the porches ; as Sirens they lure the sailor to his doom ; but chiefly they shine for us as mortals, and as mortals these artists depicted them best and most often. They painted them at the toilet, in repose, gossiping, sitting, standing, always with a sort of wonder akin to awe. The Ajanta artists could adopt conventions for their Buddhas, and had their sacred symbols, and their orthodox attitudes ; but their women are always unconventional. They did not pose women, they simply copied their poses. They were content to learn from their gestures, to portray their natures. Woman had for them a decorative value, altogether too precious to be diminished by laws. She was outside the laws of art, for she made them. They learned from her. They struggled to reproduce every turn of her head, every curve of her form, every glance of her eye. She enthralled them with her airs and graces ; enmeshed them in the mysteries of her toilet, more strongly than does the Parisienne the painter of to-day. They produced tirelessly and with a discriminating knowledge her bewildering *coiffures* ; they decked her in painstaking manner with the most beautiful trinkets they could devise. When they could not paint *Her*, then they painted her pearls and ornaments all round their

THE WOMEN OF THE AJANTA CAVES

columns. I can think of no parallel to this frank and chivalrous Woman-worship of Ajanta. Nowhere else perhaps has Woman received such perfect and understanding homage. Even the beggar girl who asks for alms in the panel over the portal of the Seventeenth Cave is beautiful. The truth is that they could not conceive of Woman otherwise. As she truly inspired them so they gave back to her in kind these graphic gifts of a whole-hearted admiration. In spite of her obvious reality one feels at Ajanta that Woman is treated not as an individual, but as a principle. She is there not female merely, but the incarnation of all the beauty of the world. Hence with all her gaiety, her charm, her *insouciance*, she never loses her dignity, and nowhere is she belittled or besmirched. Everywhere in this garden of flowers we behold the full-blown rose in its pride and perfume;—nowhere the trampled lily. “Majesty and Power” invest the Women of Ajanta quite as clearly as the Mandorla of glory surrounds the Saints of early Christian Art.

There is a panel in the First Cave of a woman in anguish. I do not know the story, but she bends low before the King, whose sword is drawn to slay. The pose of the figure is superb; the line of the back worthy of the admiration of Ingres. But more wonderful is the art that at such a prodigious moment chose to conceal the face of

THE WOMEN OF THE AJANTA CAVES

Beauty. Only the bent head is seen above the outstretched hands—little sensitive hands that hover about, but do not venture to clasp the feet of the inexorable destroyer. The impending doom is just; but how marvellously has the artist caused us to feel “the pity of it”! The guilt of the offender is forgotten in the contemplation of the awfulness of Beauty about to be destroyed. And this picture was painted in India nine hundred years before Fra Bartolommeo painted his “Magdalen” embracing the feet of the dead Christ!

I have said that nowhere is Woman besmirched in the Caves. I would add that she is nowhere degraded from the proud and prominent position she holds. I believe that for these Artist-Monks all Beauty was one, just as for them all life was one. There was no very great distinction therefore between physical and moral Beauty;—not enough to make it necessary to remove their women more than a few inches from Buddha. In the lovely picture of the mother and child adoring Buddha in the Seventeenth Cave, the painter has dwelt with loving care upon every ringlet of the woman’s hair, every exquisite feature, every curve of her supple form, as though he glorified Buddha himself by endowing his worshipper with so much loveliness. Woman always seems to confer as well as to receive at Ajanta. She is, as a general rule, neither a plaything nor a temptress,

THE WOMEN OF THE AJANTA CAVES

but equally with man does homage to her Creator. And if the men seem more specially to present to Him the gifts of holiness, she offers in His sight His own incomparable dower of Beauty and the offering is in no wise contemned by Him.

It is Woman the Sister that we see in these Religious Panels. As the Beloved we see her also and often. Very beautiful are these Love scenes. In the First Cave there is a fine composition of a Nâga Sovereign and his Queen conversing happily together; the piquant upturn of the lady's face as she glances slyly at her Lord and Master, and the latter's look of tenderest affection, have a lyrical sweetness. In the somewhat similar picture outside the Seventeenth Cave there is an air of dainty roguery about the scene, where two bright-eyed girls peep through a lattice at the sequestered lovers, and the whole subject is drawn with a light hand and lighter heart. By the way, a similar lattice motive was used by Correggio for his "Amoretti" on the walls of S. Paolo at Parma. Most of the portals of the caves are sculptured with numerous reliefs of couples, intensely interested in one another. They may be gods and goddesses, but they are most certainly lovers,—and they are happy.

Perhaps that is Woman's chief function at Ajanta, —to radiate happiness. We can never forget her; we wish never to forget her as we see her here.

THE WOMEN OF THE AJANTA CAVES

This purely objective view of Woman, seen through the genius of Indian Painters, is somehow consoling to us in an age of super-psychology. It is a view of her to which we have of late become little accustomed. The psychological novel and "sex" play which swamp our European markets have done much to divest her of the romance and mystery which should be hers by right. Writers and artists vie with one another nowadays to drag Woman down from her discreet eminence, to proclaim her as no more than mere ordinary dust,—as ordinary as Man himself. But of course the world really knows quite otherwise; and it is good to refresh ourselves in these cave-temples with the clear perspective of Woman in her all-beautifying capacity. Howsoever these paintings of her may differ from the works of a Ropps, or a Boldini, yet here on these walls is her august portrayal. Woman is here restored to us, wholly loveable, wholly beautiful, wholly untarnished. These artists of the Orient saw her, and painted her as, all things notwithstanding, she shall ever be seen and painted; they clothed her as she shall ever be clothed,—in "Majesty and Power".

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

***A STUDY OF THE
PÂTHÂRE PRABHU CASTE***

I

THE PRABHU SAGA

IT IS A TRUISM that in the greatest eras of Painting and of Sculpture, whether Bhuddist, Hindu, Mohammedan, Egyptian, Greek, or Italian, Art was the handmaid of Religion. The liberation of Art from that benign servitude has not tended to exalt her status in the Western World. Keats deplored that sad emancipation in the immortal lines :—

Glory and loveliness have passed away
For if we wander out in early morn
No wreathed incense do we see upborne
Into the East to meet the smiling day.

In pagan Greece Art was not fettered within a particular domain but pervaded the life of the people. No home was too regal or too humble for her presence. She invisibly beautified the existence of the poorest peasant, presided at his rustic festivals, painted his imagination, and in a thousand ways softened the ugly corners of life. Art was not then the companion of the few only.

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

To the cultured she might show herself in the subduing splendour of superb statuary or august painting, but to the people she was a familiar friend, and to them she taught the secret of illustrating their Faith with beautiful customs. In India, Art is still the genial and all-pervading Presence, and if she has been dethroned in the palace she has still her place in the generous heart of the People, gilding the days of the humble from sunrise to sundown with a thousand brightening touches. She has even tricked out Poverty in such picturesque trappings as to destroy its sordid aspect, making it seem a desirable illusion, and has embroidered the immense weight of Ritual with adornments that makes it a burden pleasant to bear. The Indian Religious Festivals are no less stimulating to the artists than those of Eleusis were, where we are told Apelles caught the inspiration for his picture of Venus from his glimpse of Phryne entering the sea with dishevelled hair. The fact that the people who sacrifice to art so constantly do so to a large extent subconsciously, only makes the argument more telling. It is said that a learned Commission once journeyed from Europe to Kashmir for the purpose of seeing the methods of matching dyes for the Kashmir shawls. They were cheerfully given facilities for studying the process on the spot by the manufacturers, and duly assembled, notebooks and pencils in hand,

THE PRABHU SAGA

prepared to investigate the mystery. Near the margin of the river were a troop of children, who were each given the colours that were to be matched. They set to work making pools of colour on the ground by mixing the simple primary tints that were provided, and running from one to another, dabbed their threads now in this and now in that. When they had finished the task they ran off again joyously as ever, leaving behind them the perfectly matched samples, and the learned Commissioners (as far off discovering the secret as they had been in Europe) nonplussed at this unsophisticated artistry! Whether or not this incident actually happened as described it is typical of the inexplicable art of India, and of the nonchalance of a genius as inexhaustible as the ever-burning lamps of the Rosicrucians. Of this kind are the Modellers of Benares and Bombay. In the former city they sit at the road-side making their little images of Krishna and Shiva for the festival of Makar Sankrânt, baking them in the Sun and decorating them with gay and pregnant colour; and these are purchased by hundreds of passers-by. Their more ambitious fellow-craftsmen of Bombay execute life-size images and groups, which they model and colour with wonderful skill and naturalness. These images are exhibited to the Public, who cheerfully pay their two annas for a sight of Ganpatty (Ganesha, he of the

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

elephant's head) in his wrestler's suit, Krishna playing his magic flute for Râdhâ's delighted ear, or sometimes scenes from the people's own lives—a betrothal feast, or a Hindu wedding. All these models, beautiful as many of them are, are destroyed at the close of the season, and the artists cheerfully set to work to make new ones! Their art is a legacy handed down out of the dim Past, from father to son; in many cases (such as those of the carvers and silversmiths) scarcely impaired even by the cruel disintegration of the Indian Crafts. The wheel revolves, the centuries bloom and fall to dust, but the silversmith still sits in his booth, and unless neglect and starvation and indifference extirpate him from the land, his great-great-grandchildren shall sit thus, precisely as his great-great-grandfather did before him. I once visited an old artist of this stamp who turned out such beautiful work that I asked the local authorities why they did not place students under his care to learn the secrets of the Master. They told me that he would not teach—*except to his only son*—the mighty mysteries of his craft. Even his daughter was not allowed to learn, because she must marry and *his* art would thus become the property of another family.

Perhaps no more inspiring instance of the survival of art in its fullest sense, no more delightful example of the *strength* and extent of art, and

THE PRABHU SAGA

of the warm and gracious support which art can give to existence, holding Life up, so to speak, and keeping it on a level (in spite of vicissitudes and poverty) immensely higher than Life unsustained can attain to, will be found anywhere in our world to-day than among the Hindu community known as the Pâthâre or Pâtâne Prabhus.¹ One has only to wander among these gifted people in order to discover that "Glory and loveliness" have *not* yet "passed away".

People say that the Prabhus in ancient times were resident in Udaipur—that gorgeous medley of lake-side palaces and their inverted semblances, and of Marwar. The Mohammedan Conquerors drove them out of Rajputana into Kathiawar, the blunt peninsula which on the map of India thrusts forward so boldly upon the Arabian Sea, where they thought to settle in Prabhâs-Pattan. But the invader followed in their very footsteps. In A.D. 1024 the Iconoclast Mahomud of Gazani entered Kathiawar and destroyed the temple of Somnâth. The Prabhus—the defenders of the Sacred Shrine—retreated, with their Ruler Bhimdev (himself a Prabhu, who claimed his descent from the line

¹ Art still exists among the Hindus throughout India in forms as beautiful and varied as those preserved by this community; but as its art is very typical, and as it has been my privilege to have had special opportunities of studying it, this essay deals more particularly with the Pâthâre Prabhus.

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

of Kusha, a son of Râma), into Anhilwâd Pâtan.¹ Later Gujarat itself fell to the Conquerors ; and about A.D. 1293 the Prabhus settled in the islands of Bombay and Mahim. The origin of their Caste or Clan appellation is not less interesting than the agitated history of these early settlers.

The Marathi word "Pathar" denotes a table-land, and as the Prabhus occupied the plains of Rajputana they are termed "Pâthâre Prabhus". They are also known by the alternative name of "Pâtâne" Prabhus. This word has a dual significance, indicating a resident of the city of Pâtan in Kathiawar, and also, according to its Sanskrit derivation, "Pratyenas", a Protector. In those days of military prowess, King Bhimdev appointed certain Satraps to govern the districts he had conquered, and these he styled "Prabhus" or "Lords". This Monarch, whose dynasty held sway over Bombay for a century, created twelve Kshatriya (warrior) Lords of the Solar Race, who were "Pâthâre" or "Pâtâne Prabhus". After the collapse of Bhimdev's Line, the Prabhus, though much declined from their high offices of State, maintained the proud appellation of their Clan, and eventually this appellation came to distinguish a special Caste. It is interesting to trace even at the present time the evidence in the names of

¹ From this district of Kathiawar they were again driven down to Champâner in Gujarat.

THE PRABHU SAGA

Prabhu families of their military glory in the Past, for the Prabhu surnames were all in the first place conferred as titles by their famous King, and the successors of his house, as a reward for feats-of-arms on many a well-contested field. Some of the best-known names with their meanings are :

| | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|
| Ajinkya | Invincible. |
| Dharâdhar | The Holder of the Earth. |
| Dhurandhar | The Foremost. |
| Gorakshakar | The Protector of Cows. |
| Jayakar | The Victorious. |
| Kirtikar | The Illustrious. |
| Kothâre | Home Minister. |
| Mânkar | The Noble. |
| Nâyak | The Leader. |
| Râne | The King Lord. |
| Râo | The Noble Lord. |

The rousing nomenclatures of this artistic Caste are more indicative

Of old unhappy far-off things,
And battles long ago

than of the peaceful avocations of the Prabhus of to-day ; they smack of the sword rather than of the brush ; the more recent history of the Community is one of very chequered fortune. They had to beat the sword into a ploughshare, accepting smaller offices under the Maratha Confederacy of the great Patriot Shivaji, whose seat was at Satara, and of the Peshwas, as the neighbouring

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

Rulers of Poona were called ; for the Prabhus left Bombay when the Portuguese appeared, being unwilling to change their religion. The British occupation was the signal for a return of the Prabhus to the beloved Island, where they flourished and almost monopolised the best offices under the East India Company. If the sword had brought them glory, the pen now gave them wealth, and it is said that in the Eighteenth Century they were among the richest folk in Bombay. To-day, though this Golden Age has also disappeared into the limbo of the unforgotten Past, the latest phase is one of not less interesting if different achievements. Though the chink of Gold Mohurs no longer sounds in the Prabhu palaces or counting houses, they enjoy the not less golden possession of widespread public respect and the confidence of the Government. The Prabhus hold important offices in the Bombay Presidency as Judges, Educationalists, Lawyers, Doctors, Merchants, Engineers, Artists, and Architects ; though scarcely more than 4,100 people now represent this once powerful Caste.

II

ART AND IMMORTALITY

AMONG THE PRABHUS the Poet is still honoured and prized. The Poet is present at their Social Meetings, and sometimes recites or rather intones his verses in honour of some favoured guest, or at the marriage feast reads some beautiful Epithalamium. One may see in this survival of the Bard, and in his Sagas, something that still links with a living bond the clerkly Prabhu of the present day and his sword-wielding ancestor. Such are the mutations of time! The great Lords and their power are gone—and no shred of that power remains, except the martial names of their peaceful descendants. But the Bard who was wont to sing the deeds of warriors at the banquet; who by his words could add a spark to the flash of the victor's eye, or soften the pains of a brave but vanquished enemy, still lingers with us, though the subjects of his themes and all their emulative children's children have long been dust. The ancient recorder of past valour alone remains to remind the busy penmen during their moments of leisured social relaxation

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

of the Past, and to sing in less exalted though not less moving strain of the triumphs of Art, Love, or Beauty. Other times, other themes ! The Poet remains, and the Artist, those deathless units of great nations—like the Twin-Brethren who fought for the right in the van of the Battle of Lake Regulus, themselves the only immortals in those two hosts of warring, perishing humanity ! The Prabhu Poet is still an institution, and may beckon one back through the centuries to the sources of his art and illumination. It is scarcely so with the Prabhu Artist. The records of the past century include the names of Modellers, Painters, and writers on art ; but where are the models and the paintings ? As well look for these in the shifting furrows of the Indian Ocean as in the not less protean purlieus of Indian cities ! The difficulties of tracing and finding in India are immense. A work of art must either be seized upon the wing or it generally vanishes for ever. No second thoughts may safely be entertained by the collector of contemporary talent. A picture flashes into view, dazzles by its promise—then vanishes between the folds of the green cloth case (daphtar) and . . . is gone ! A beautiful piece of modelling is seen once in the artist's studio, and on the next visit, if indeed we find the artist at all, we enquire in vain for the lovely thing which has haunted our thoughts during the interim,

ART AND IMMORTALITY

and whose compelling attraction has driven us—uselessly of course—to look upon it once more ! Is it sad that that country whose art was once “graven within the hills” should now appear to write it upon the sands ? At first sight the excessively fugitive work of so vast a number of Indian artists, the atrociously evanescent nature of their efforts, the appalling waste of genius, seem anomalies in the laws of creation, an outrage upon our patience. Tantalus never raged more furiously to seize upon the viands that were spread before his gaze, but beyond his frenzied reach, than does the art-lover in India who finds himself surrounded, literally, upon all sides, by these phantom pictures, statues, and decorations. See them he may, here and there, at any moment ; but let him clutch at them and they will elude the grasp !

This, however, is but a very superficial view of what is really a very deep matter. The old artist who diffidently brings one a bundle of his drawings, spreads these upon the table to astound one with an apotheosis of Line never imagined as possible *nowadays*,—and who, after politely acknowledging incoherent praises such as the disturbing revelation permits one to utter, packs up the fragile sheets and, with them, is seen no more, is in truth the reassuring factor in the case. This old transitory artist is in reality

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

the element of permanence in these ephemeral transactions.

“Nought may endure but mutability”, sang the Poet, and the old Indian artist has but illustrated the profundity of this saying. For *he* survives. Everything—or nearly everything—that should surround him, nourish his art, sustain his hopes, and feed his soul, has perished. Where are the Kingly Patrons of India—to whom a blank space upon the wall was anathema, who granted their artists a nearness to their persons that indicated at once a reciprocal spirit of protection on the one hand, and respectful devotion on the other? Where are the Royal Builders whose ante-chambers were besieged by eager craftsmen; to gaze at whose drawings the Monarch would withdraw his glance from the throngs of less interesting courtiers, and to further whose dreams was the object of vast schemes of Royal Munificence? Where are the public in India who applauded the successful painter, sunning themselves in the reflection that he was of *their* country or of *their* city or of *their* Caste, savouring his works with the relishing pride of members of his own family? Most of the art-loving Rulers have disappeared;—India’s Architect-Kings are no more; the courtier no longer finds it convenient to acknowledge, if only by the cold nod of formality, the artist—his erstwhile successful rival! The Indian artist

ART AND IMMORTALITY

is not to-day the brilliant appanage of the most magnificent Patrons that the world has ever known ; happy the Sculptor who can get from the poorest folk (the sturdy remnant of his believing followers) the few annas he asks for a view of his models. *But he still survives.* Like the fish that can leave its own element and walk upon the land, the Indian artist has learned to live *outside his* element. Without the patronage, support, and admiration of the great (which are the very life-warmth of the artist's heart), without feasts, or wealth, or the adulation of the populace which was dear to him ; deprived of his studio, his august sitters, his splendid *milieu*, his repose of mind ; robbed of the fuel of sparkling eyes and coral lips that fed the fires of his eager soul ; criticised, traduced, contemned, even ridiculed, at best depreciated, *he still exists.* Though his hand is no longer requisitioned, to give the living touch of its art to the palace wall, that hand is still *there* to be so employed again ! This is true permanence—a permanence greater than all the enduring evidence of the art that clothed itself with the immortality of stone and bronze. And perhaps these fleeting pieces of paper, with their pencilled designs, shall be more lasting monuments of India's art than the chiselled columns of King Asoka.

But it is sad for the artist ! He, a flotsam upon uncharted seas, eddies here and there at

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

the mercy of unknown currents, threatened at every moment of his perilous and uncertain voyage with being engulfed and dragged down to unsounded depths ! As Galileo shattered all the marshalled arguments that had proved him *wrong* by one heart-broken cry, which was an assertion of *right* from his deepest soul—so the Indian artist has persisted in asserting himself against all probability, against the weight of argument—and almost against reason itself. A diamond lost within a dunghill,—he almost alone among millions has never doubted his own *raison d'être* ! In these Dark Ages of the Greater Knowledge in which we live the cold scintillations of modern Science, the mountainous upheavals of Commerce, and the vaunting shriek of the Machine are arguments strong enough to wrest Art from the most tenacious grasp. The humble philosopher who turns to India in his extremity will read in the dark eyes of ten thousand disinherited but constant artists the reproof of his irresolution, the upbraiding of his little Faith, and all the evidences of Truth. Then let shame of his own cowardice come upon him, and pride in such company nerve his determination, until he turns from the triumphing materialist, and with unshaken hand subscribes in characters of his own blood, if need be, his adherence to the Covenant of Beauty.

III

THE PRIESTESS OF THE SHRINE

THE INFLUENCE OF WOMAN has been no less pronounced in Indian than in Western Art. In her triple artistic aspect, as the Subject, the Inspirer, and the Artist, Woman is still revered in India.

With the passing of Ancient Greece passed for a time the art-creating spell of Woman's beauty so far as the Western World is concerned. But while the Dark Ages held Europe in a twilight of artistic ignorance it was not so in India. That Land—ever the country of the Idealist—knew how to preserve her own artistic gospel of Woman's beauty. Painting was, as it is now, the art which the Indian loved most, and between the first and seventh centuries Indian artists were painting the interiors and exteriors of the Buddhist Caves. Long before had they so painted but time has taken the earlier works to himself. In the Ajanta Caves we see Woman, happy, smiling, radiant, restored to her Empire of Art. At Ajanta she reigns supreme, and here too just as in Ancient Greece she raised her delineators to great heights

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

of achievement. I confess that if there be an excuse for enthusiasm anywhere it is in my opinion to be found in the Ajanta Caves.

The Age of Chivalry in Europe brought Woman back a part of her lost Kingdom, though not her realm of Art. The Greeks, together with the artistic legacy they left to posterity, handed on a wealth of poetic fancy which has no rival save in the great Epics of India, and has moulded in one way or another the art of the Western World.

The women or women-spirits of Greek Fancy are still part and parcel of the inheritance of Western artists, and have dignified all women with the reflection of their physical or moral beauties. In the Age of Chivalry the same types are seen in a new garb; the artistic ideas of the ancients had been subjected to the test of a fiery crucible, and Art reappears as a babe and has to begin a new "Avatâra". Woman from serving as the model for the Fine Arts has become the chief executant of such art as remains. To her slender fingers is resigned the task of weaving into the arras hangings of her Father's hall the heroic deeds of her chosen Knight, while to him falls the need for making a name that shall be cried by the Heralds in the Lists of the Tourney and sung by the Bards in the Bowers of Ladies. Woman moves through the pages of the *Morte*

THE PRIESTESS OF THE SHRINE

D'Arthur—those living embers of a dimly luminous age—as through a sunless world whose hills have lost the afterglow of Greece, and not yet caught the effulgence of the coming Italian dawn. She cannot be shown in the glory of truth because the artists are not there. Only the vehicle of Romance is left to her. Yet even so, how profoundly has the Woman of Chivalry contrived to leave her impress upon the world's art, although her portrait was not painted until modern times, and by those to whom she was a beautiful dream and not a living reality! The Age of Chivalry presents Woman as a unit—the chief certainly—in a world of shadows, between the anthropomorphic Deities of Athens and of Florence. This Shadow—Woman was not clothed upon with flesh until modern art consciously discovered her in Literature. That is a different thing from finding Aphrodite in the foam of the Ionian Islands, or from discovering the Source of Ganges in the hair of the Moon-crested god! Poetry can instruct us in unrivalled form of inconceivable truths, until these sink melody-wafted into our souls and become a part of them, but it needs the brush of the Painter to stamp upon our hearts the instant signification of Buddha in the divine reverie that seems to lift us at once into the seven Heavens, as he stands at Ajanta; it requires the chisel of the Sculptor to strike beneath the armour of convention so

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

as to wound our very hearts with the beauty of the Dryad of Sanchi.

Probably to nine out of ten travellers who visit India with open eyes for the first time, the most memorable feature about Bombay is neither its handsome buildings nor teeming wharfs and thoroughfares, but the dignified figures of the Indian women who pass along its streets. The Indian Woman is the epitome of India, and few will believe it possible for Indian Art to succumb while so perpetual and unique a source of living inspiration remains. But in our study of the Pâthâre Prabhus it is not only Woman as the inspirer and source of art that we meet, but Woman as the votary of Religion, a Religion which has little to distinguish it from Art itself. The Prabhu maidens are a band of vestals whose lives are dedicated to the service of art, and the matrons carry the torch with them to their husband's houses.

Even in India—the favoured Land of Beauty—the Prabhu women are known for the refined and rare charm that distinguishes them. The young Prabhu girls are sister-flowers to those with which they deck their hair, Roses, Dahlias, Chrysanthemums, Jasmine, Mogrâ, and Madanbâna or Cupid's arrow. With her brocaded Benares saree, and veil of silver tissue; her splendid eyes, and fine arched brows; her long plait of glossy hair, and hands and feet like those of the Medici



A CHINESE PAINTER AT WORK AND HER PAINTS

THE PRIESTESS OF THE SHRINE

Venus, the Prabhu Girl, when seen at a Wedding or Festival, seems indeed to be the incarnate spirit of Art itself.

This beautiful and cultivated Being is at once the animator and the vehicle of art—no less the priestess of the goddess than the goddess herself! The members of every Prabhu family worship daily their hereditary goddess, Laxmi, Indrâyani, Prabhâvati, Ekvirâ, Jogeshwari, and Châmundâ. These household Deities are revered as a matter of course, no matter what other Deities are adored, and their temples are numerous in Bombay. Early in the morning—immediately after her bath—the Prabhu girl begins that delightful use of art as the indispensable adjunct of her devotions by drawing round the pedestal of the Sacred Tulsi plant (or basil) before which she performs her “pujâ” (worship), a Rângoli or sand-picture. This decoration in vivid colours consists of a running border with the symbol of the “Swastika” at its four corners. The design is drawn upon the floor without any kind of guiding lines except dots put in without measurements to mark the points, and without pencil or brush. The charming artist takes some white marble dust in her hand and by holding it between finger and thumb in a certain way executes a fine outline and sometimes a *double* line, which she then fills in with different colours, often in most elaborate patterns. Between

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

this form of plant worship and that of poor Isabella what a world of difference lies—though both are themes for Poet and Philosopher !

The Tulsi plant is but one object which is worshipped or rather sanctified by the art of the Prabhu maiden. With her art is a Religion, and her decorative drawing is part of her household daily life. She has never been taught, but from her early bright-eyed youth has watched the skilful fingers of her Mother and Sister making the pictures that embellish the family Feasts and Ceremonies throughout the year. On all auspicious occasions the women resort to their delightful drawing. Upon the birth of a child, or at the Thread, and the Marriage ceremonies, the sword is adored by these King's Daughters in memory of their warrior-fathers. But with it they worship the implements of their changed present-day life—the degenerate or superior weapons (it is a matter of opinion !) of pen, paper, and inkstand. On the important occasion of the Thread Ceremony the Prabhu girl draws a mango tree on a large sheet of paper, or upon the wall itself, surrounded by eight maidens with "waving lamps", as the vessels which bear these sacred lights are called, and this picture forms a background for the sword and its peaceful clerical companions. At a Wedding the number of figures in the mural panel is increased to sixteen. A

60

THE PRIESTESS OF THE SHRINE

nativity is an occasion for a special thanksgiving picture of a cradle with a child within it to glorify these new objects of worship. The annual feasts make each their special claim upon the art of the Prabhu ladies, as the most charming of many ceremonies. These are so interesting that we cannot refrain from lingering over the stimulating details. The Hindu New Year's Day (or Gudi Pâdwâ) is observed by the Prabhus by flying a flag outside the verandah in front of the house, consisting of a silk garment flown from a bamboo. The flag-staff is crowned by an inverted silver vase or "lota," and from its point hangs a garland of marigolds with a spray of mango leaves at the end. Below this pennon is placed a kalasha (or brass lota) which stands on a chowrang or stool. It is now that the Prabhu maidens are called in to draw one of their beautiful Rângolis or sand-pictures all round the base of these symbols of worship.

The origin of another Festival, that of the Vat-Sâvitri or the Worship of the Banyan Tree, forms one of the best known of all India's sacred stories. It chanced that a certain Princess, Sâvitri by name, married Satyawân, son of the exiled King Dyumatsen, who lived in the seclusion of the forest. When the bethrothal was announced by King Ashvapati, Sâvitri's Father, the Sage or Rishi, Nârada, who was on a visit to the Court of

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

King Ashvapati, foretold that the event was of evil augury to him and to his daughter, for the youthful bridegroom was doomed by Fate to die in one short year after his wedding should be celebrated. At this heart-rending news—for the fiat of the holy man was as that of Brahmâ himself—the King entreated his beautiful daughter not to marry such a short-lived person. She, however, with the true constancy of an Indian Princess, remained resolute in her choice. The marriage took place, although the measure of a funeral march seemed to pulsate through all the would-be cheerful chords of the musicians; and Sâvitri, leaving behind her the Royal luxury of her home, went with her bridegroom into the depths of the savage forest. Here she never allowed her husband to leave her side, nor abandoned for an instant her self-ordained duty of watching over him. For four days before the fatal term approached the fair Sâvitri observed a rigid fast, and on the last day she accompanied Satyawân to the forest to gather fruit and fuel. After toiling all day, at night the young man sank as from exhaustion, but they were the pangs of his inevitable death which had seized upon him. Sâvitri, who saw that the doom foretold had arrived, seated herself upon the ground, took her husband's head upon her lap, and thus waited; and around her the wild jungle beasts roared and

THE PRIESTESS OF THE SHRINE

howled, the owls uttered their dismal notes, and the wind rustled mournfully through the champaka and banyan trees. Then on a sudden the god Yama, who is Death himself, stood before her, for he had come to carry her husband's soul to the Realms of Celestial Light. Sâvitri surrendered her charge and walked meekly behind the god as he went on his return journey bearing his burden; and as she walked she spoke so sweetly and with such gentle and faithful resignation, that the stern Yama himself was touched to an unwonted interest in this widowed maiden such as his rough heart had rarely known. Yet Sâvitri hid a world of woman's cunning beneath that mildness, and so the god was beguiled into promising consolatory blessings for herself, her Father, and her family. At last, captivated by her gentle words, Yama was deceived into promising her a *child*. "And how", asked Sâvitri instantly, "can a chaste woman enjoy that blessing since her husband's soul hath been carried off by thee?" Faced with this dilemma the god, who could not recall his promise, was fain to restore life to Satyawân, who with his faithful Sâvitri was blessed with many years of continued happiness. It was under a banyan tree that Satyawân lay when Death arrived to summon him. The tree is therefore sacred and worshipped annually on the fifteenth day of the month Jyestha (about

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

the 1st day of June) by all married Hindu women. The Prabhu girls, however, do not necessarily go to the banyan trees for these ceremonies but adore the drawing of the tree which they themselves execute upon the wall. Art is here preferred as a substitute for nature ;—or is it not that to these truly artistic people the religious rite of drawing the tree in the first place, of reverently delineating that auspicious example of the Creator's handiwork, implies a deeper need of adoration than the simple worship of the natural object itself? Loving study and dedicated skill go to the making of this graphic offering. In general two banyans are drawn, one to represent Satyawân and the other to represent Sâvitri. Sâvitri's tree is always of more modest proportions than the other, as becomes the emblem of the meek but by no means artless heroine. The spaces surrounding the pictured trees are filled in with representations of the articles and utensils used for worship ; at the upper corners of the panel the girls draw the emblems of Sun and Moon ;—" For ", say they, " the worship of this Banyan tree should be observed by all married women so long as Sun and Moon shall shine upon the Earth ".

IV

PICTURES AND STORIES

ONE OF THE MOST interesting and probably also one of the most ancient of these Religious customs is that of Cobra Worship, or "Nâg-Panchami". The hooded King is adored upon his auspicious day of the month of Shrâvana (August). On this day the snake-charmers gather a rich harvest, invading Bombay in their hundreds and parading the streets crying out "Nâg ni Pujâ" as they make their rounds. The women-folk of the Hindus propitiate the dreaded snake with sweetmeats, libations of milk, and flowers, which they throw upon it, while its owner is made happy with a pious "pice" or two. In addition to these exercises the Prabhus utilise a board, or lacquered seat ("pâta"), on which the head female of the house executes in sandal paste a drawing representing seven cobras. The board thus decorated is worshipped by the family with all the customary observances. It may be explained that a small piece of sandal-wood is rubbed with water on a grindstone, until the wood is reduced to powder, which being mixed

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

with water forms a paste. To colour this a small quantity of saffron is mingled, giving it a pale yellow tint. It is applied to the scarlet lacquered background of the "pâta" with a brush, and when dry the bright colours stand out with brilliant effect. There is a tradition on which this Cobra worship is based. Once upon a time an orphan girl who lived with her Father-in-law found herself without the prospect of a Holiday, since having no relatives on her Mother's side, there was no one to invite her to go and stay with them although the day of Festival had arrived. As she was sitting sadly and lonely by the river-side an old Brahmin approached. The Sage enquired of her why she was crying. Her reply was that she had no relatives to take her away to enjoy the holiday. The old Brahmin with a sort of encouragement in his look told the astonished girl that he was her Uncle, and that if she would care to follow him he would take her to his house. She joyfully accepted the offer and went with the old man. Now that Brahmin was none other than Nâg the Cobra, who, having taken compassion on the lonely girl when he heard her crying, had assumed the form in which he had appeared to her. She had not followed her pretended Uncle more than a few steps when he turned and cautioned her not to fear anything, whatever she might see; she acquiesced; then to her surprise

66

PICTURES AND STORIES

she saw the old man lift up a huge stone that lay on the ground before them. As the stone was turned over the girl perceived steps descending. Both entered the opening and went down a long winding flight of stairs, until they came into a hall, where on a great couch lay a female Cobra waiting for her husband. The Brahmin reassumed his rightful form of a Cobra, and speaking with a human voice told his wife that the maiden was his niece and that he had brought her with him to spend the holiday. But unfortunately the female Cobra was in labour at the time, and she asked her husband to fetch a hanging lamp ("lâmandivâ") and to make the girl stand by her side holding it. In a few minutes the Cobra was delivered of seven little ones which began to writhe and twist upon the ground. The girl became frightened and dropped the lamp on the tail of one of the tiny reptiles, with the sad result that the tale was cut off. The kind old Cobra, however, without showing any anger at the accident, encouraged the girl not to be frightened, and so managed matters that after all she was able to enjoy a splendid holiday with her new friends. On the following day the Cobra escorted her back to her Father-in-law's house, cautioning her not to tell her Relatives about her adventure, and advising her to worship the Cobras on the day on which this occurrence had

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

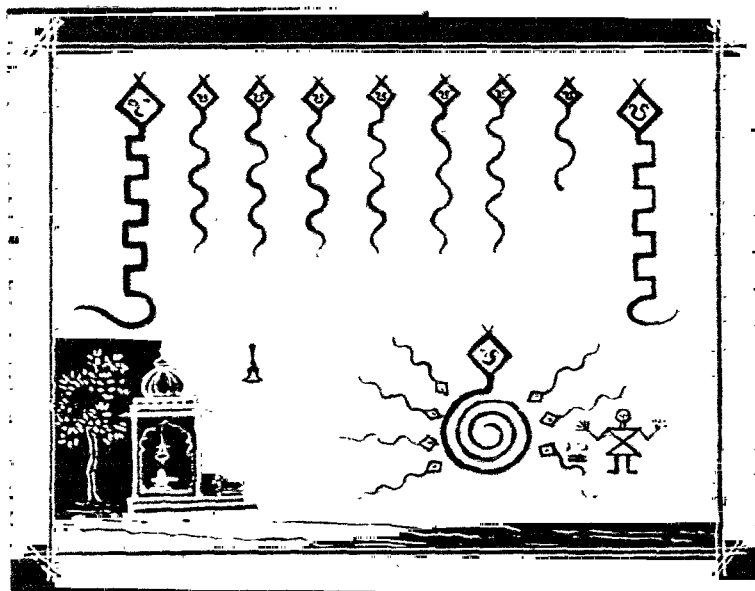
taken place. A year passed. The little serpents had now grown quite big, and the six used to tease and annoy the seventh to whom the misfortune had occurred, by calling him "Cut-tail". Now it happened that one day "Cut-tail" went complaining to his Mother, and asking the reason of his tail having been cut off.

The old Mother explained how the accident had happened. At this "Cut-tail" became angry, and took a vow to be revenged upon her who had been the cause of his disfigurement, though the Mother Cobra commanded him not to do any harm to the little girl who was esteemed by his Father as one of their Cousins. But unmindful of his Mother's wishes he started off to find the girl's house, with the purpose of biting and killing her. When he reached and entered her dwelling he saw his adopted cousin waving a lamp before a panel on which she had drawn a beautiful picture of the seven baby Cobras. As she waved the lamp she sang :—

All seven are my brothers, but my "Cut-tail" is my darling !

The little Cobra, hearing this song, was mollified, and, advancing with friendly inclinations, told her that he was come to greet her on the holiday (Nâg-Panchami). She was overjoyed, gave him milk to drink, decorated him with flowers, waved the lamp in front of him as a sign of respect, and

68



PICTURES PAINTED ON THE LACQUERED BOARDS FOR "NAG-PANCHAMI."
(OLD AND NEW STYLE.)

On the left, as the G. family is seen, and the girl dropping the lamp on. (Curran's)

PICTURES AND STORIES

at last prostrated herself before him. "Cut-tail" enjoyed his reception so much that he returned in a hurry to his Mother's house, eager to tell them all at home the news as to how he had been received by their adopted Cousin. But having a mind to frighten his Mother he gave a bite to a rat that he passed on his way and stained his mouth with blood. As soon as his Mother set eyes on him with his blood-besmeared face she began cursing him for the ill-deed that she supposed he had done. But he apologised for the deception, telling her the truth, and how his adopted Cousin had shown her respect to him personally, calling out his name first as "Cut-tail", and observing, with pictures and ceremonies, that day in honour of their family as the one on which she had first made their acquaintance.

Since then the Festival has been observed by all Hindu ladies, and this story is told by the Prabhu women to the young people on the day of "Nâg-Panchami" as the reason for its observance.

Cobra-worship is not the only festival in which the artist is preferably a matron of the Prabhu household and not a vestal. The Mother's Day (Pithori holiday) is one which places upon the shoulders of some elderly lady of the house the responsibility of drawing the necessary pictures. On this occasion, which occurs twenty-five days after

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

the worship of the Cobras, the Prabhu ladies make elaborate and exquisite drawings of sixty-four "Yoginees" (or female Deities) on a panel, or lacquered seat. The rites of worship are performed by the same lady, or by the Mother of the household. The Mother's Day is a very ancient institution, the origin of which is explained in this wise. A certain woman was delivered of a child every year on this particular day, but on each successive occasion the child died soon after its birth. At last, on the birth of yet another infant, the Mother-in-law drove Mother and child from the house, as accursed creatures, whose acts in a previous incarnation must have been of exceptional depravity since so dreadful a fate had overtaken them. But while the poor forlorn woman went weeping through the forest clasping her baby in her arms there appeared to her on a sudden a shining goddess with pity in her looks, who asked of her the reasons for her grief. On hearing the outcast's story the goddess commanded her to wait until midnight when sixty-four "Yoginees" with their celestial retinue would reach that spot to celebrate a banquet—when she was to lay her child at their feet and pray for a blessing. The deity then took her departure. The woman waited as she was bidden in doubt and anxiety; and at midnight there was a rushing of the wind among the trees like the sweep of invisible wings;

PICTURES AND STORIES

strains of the most beautiful music thrilled upon the air ; and suddenly the forest seemed to be full of stars, which were the eyes of the "Yoginees" as they approached, darting their effulgent glances. The poor woman fell upon her face, told her story, and uttered her prayer. And the "Yoginees"¹ were moved, and had compassion, and blessed her and her child, so that the curse was removed.

The Prabhu Mothers strictly observe this holiday as a fast, until after the "Pujâ" has been performed at nightfall, and all the children of the house have taken their meals. A solicitude so well in accord with the poignant tradition no doubt inspires the custom of giving "vâyanas" or gifts which the fond Mother bestows upon the little ones.

"Gauri Pujâ," that is the worship of Pârvati, takes place during the holiday season in honour of Ganpati (Ganesha), the Elephant-headed Deity.

Gauri is also Umâ, or Ambikâ, for all four names but designate the same wondrous daughter of the Mountain King—the bride of Shiva,² who roams with him for ever among the untrodden passes of the Himalayas. On this festival she is worshipped in the form of the Balsam plant. It

¹ At this festival, some worship the "Yoginees," or Goddesses, and others the Apsarâs, or Nymphs. This story is fully told in the Appendix.

² The Prabhus are worshippers of Shiva.

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

is customary on the third day of the holidays for each family to purchase a bundle of balsam. The Prabhu girls proceed to paint a panel about four feet square with patterns and floral decorations in sandal-paste. This is executed on the floor of the verandah of the house. But as a rule a Prabhu girl will also decorate with mural paintings a portion of the wall in the women's apartments, to commemorate the Reception, or worship of Gauri.¹ The bundle of Balsam plants is shaped like a doll and is carefully dressed in silk draperies. Her head (that of a girl) is made of paper, painted in colours ; and the hands are also cut out of paper. She is then adorned with the jewellery and ornaments which are commonly worn by Prabhu ladies ; and now she is "Gauri" herself who, though the high Goddess, is on this occasion deemed to have laid aside her snowy crown and sceptre, and to have become a girl again who has arrived to stay in her parents' house during the period of rejoicing. Before the head, hands, and ornaments are added, "Gauri" (who is nearly as large in bulk as an artist's lay figure) is placed in the arms of the smallest maiden in the family, who takes her seat in the centre of a beautiful coloured sand-picture which has been drawn by her relatives upon the floor, while the painted panel on the wall behind her is the background

¹ Pronounced "Gowrie."

PICTURES AND STORIES

for her seat of State. The little maiden, clasping her wondrous Doll, is now part of the centre of interest as she sits there among the brightly coloured pictures which form the chief ornaments in these ceremonies. The Mother, or some elderly female relative, reverently adores the little girl, and the sacred image she carries; and when these devotions are ended, the Mother leads the way in procession, followed by the child and her treasured bundle, and by all the train of children in the house. In this manner "Gauri" is carried into every room and every corner of the home. The Mother, who bears in her hand a tray with a "waving lamp" (to use a colloquialism to denote the "panchârti" or lamp with five wicks), and a "kunkum" with the red powder which is used for placing the sacred seal upon the forehead, turns from time to time and addresses "Gauri" with the words, "Hast thou arrived O Beautiful One (Lakshmi)?" She asks this question three times, and to each query the little one (who speaks for the image) answers "Yea!" Again, thrice the Mother asks, "Hast thou arrived, O Honoured Lady (Bai)?" and thrice "Gauri," by means of her young supporter's lips, returns the same reassuring reply. All the nooks and corners of the house having been visited, "Gauri" is brought to the principal place where she is to be worshipped during the holidays, and

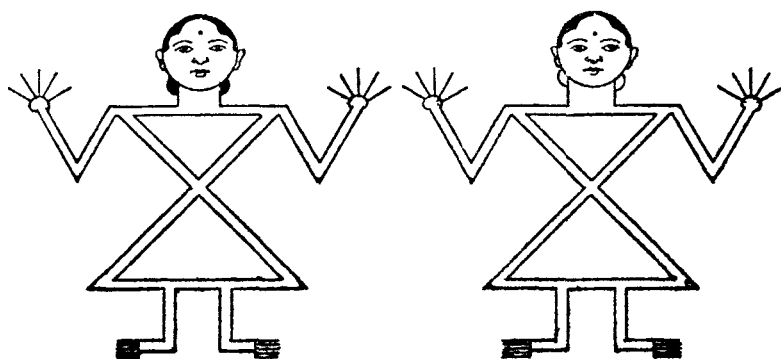
THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

installed in a chair in front of the decorated wall panel, which always contains representations of the articles of the household, furniture, etc., and of objects surrounding the house, together with a picture of a temple of Shiva. The panel is chart-like in its effect, but, in spite of the simplicity of its construction, the skill and accurate observation of the girl-artists in portraying the elaborate variety of objects is extraordinary. "Gauri" is now one of the family and is joyously made welcome and entertained by the children. But—alas, for the short duration of Angels' Visits ! The day following her arrival another plant of the balsam leaves is placed near "Gauri", and is the recipient of the family's homage, but this is her "Brother-in-law" who has come to take "Gauri" away.

This beautiful living story is drawn and enacted by the children and the Prabhu ladies every year ; the graphic pictures which they draw are neither trivial nor childish, but vivid vehicles of instruction. The skill of the girl artists commemorates the surprising event as a natural though still a rare, an awesome happening, upon which the children look with wide but knowledgeable eyes. The resplendent goddess has for once renounced the "pomp and circumstance" of her Celestial House, to descend the skies, and enter a human family. She who takes the Moon in her hand

PICTURES AND STORIES

as a toy with which to decorate her husband's hair when they sport together upon the starry peak of Mount Kailâsa, has become the companion and playfellow of the little ones on earth. "Gauri" the Incarnation of all Beauty, who remains always aloof from all men—the Unattainable—the Superhuman Ideal,—the heart of this Gauri has been coaxed and captured. She has come down from her mansions of the sky caught in the strong cords of children's hands !



FIGURES OF DEITIES
IN CONVENTIONALIZED GEOMETRICAL PATTERN

V

THE GIFT OF PERPETUAL YOUTH

IN THE PRABHU household the Sun is worshipped during the month of Âshwin (September and October), on Sundays only. The girls draw a picture of the luminary itself in red colour on the copper plate which is called a "tahnman". Red flowers are offered to Surya, the Sun-God, and for preference the large scarlet blooms known as Shoe-flowers (or Japa-Kusum) are selected; these are easy to procure since all the year round they hang here and there in the dark-green shrubberies, like blood-stains upon the guilty, which neither time nor rain can efface. The principal object in these ceremonies is the decorative presentment of the Sun, drawn by the Prabhu ladies.

Most celebrated of all these picture mysteries is the Feast of Lamps. This lasts for some twenty days from the fifteenth day of Âshwin, known as the Divâli Holidays; during the whole period of these holidays the Prabhu dwellings bloom with an ever-changing series of their wonderful sand-pictures. It is an annual Exhibition of Decorative

1

2

3

4

5

6

7



A PRABHU GIRL PAINTING A DECORATIVE PANEL.

THE GIFT OF PERPETUAL YOUTH

Art. At this time it is a fascinating spectacle to see scores of young Prabhu girls busy decorating with pictures the space in front of the verandahs of their homes, in the Prabhu localities, such as the Navi Vâdi Lane, and the Thâkurdwâr Road in Bombay. Each family seems to be able to produce one, and frequently several of these girl-artists, who can draw and paint a pattern with their fingers only, without having undergone any up-to-date instruction in art from a trained teacher. Each day a new picture takes the place of the old one. It is commenced about four in the afternoon, and finished with brilliant but harmonised colours by dusk. The picture must be completed early in order to be ready for the ceremony of the lamps at sunset. These lamps are modelled from lumps of wheaten flour, filled with oil, or ghee, and furnished with a wick. A lamp is placed in the centre of each decorative pattern, when it is left to burn until the oil is exhausted. Upon the first night of the festival only, a number of such lamps are arranged upon each picture, and as the twilight deepens their illumination throws the vivid colours and arabesques into strong relief. Every morning the design of the night before is removed with cow-dung and water, and the surface prepared for the fresh drawing of the afternoon. Wonderful—wasteful Indian talent! Yet who shall say that these pictures, although more evanescent than

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

the flower-like beauty of the artists, are altogether lost ?

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

I shall not easily forget an occasion when it was once my privilege to be the guest of the Pâthâre Prabhu Samâj, or Social Club. It was an experience of unforgettable interest. On that afternoon it was my pleasant task to read a paper on Indian Art, and its reception was of that hospitable and kindly sort which must fill the European professor with the sense and shame of ignorance. There is always so much to learn in India, that the greatest foreign pandit could do no more than touch the fringe of the mighty mystery. Overpowered by reflections like these—reflections to which the crowded assembly, the keen intellectual faces, the stirring traditions of the Prabhus, and the amazing artistic endowments of the community all lent their weight—I was cheered and encouraged by the President—a man of distinction alike in his own learned profession and in the field of Politics. The speaker delivered one of the most instructive extempore addresses on Indian Art to which it has ever been my good fortune to listen. But I well recollect that it was not so much his brilliant survey of the subject, nor his incisive searchings into the many ramifications, twistings, and complexities of the problem that held my

THE GIFT OF PERPETUAL YOUTH

attention, as the wonderful presentment of Indian Art in its broadest aspects, as the partaker of an indissoluble partnership with Man himself. It was neither upon painting nor sculpture that he laid especial stress, but on an art that included *all* the beautiful and singular manifestations of the Indian mind and hand, an art all-embracing and deep, an art of the home as well as of the studio. It seemed as though it were the lost Art of Europe of which he spoke, resisting the impact of fearful things in her last, and perhaps her first, citadel—India. He spoke of the battle of Beauty versus Common Sense, of Ideals versus Hard Facts, of the fight of the celestial dreamer against the hard-headed rationalist.

Can anyone doubt that India is to-day the battle-ground of such a contest? Who can foretell the result? Perhaps in the very nature of things the fight must be a losing one for the artists and the art-lovers; perhaps they have lost too much ground ever to regain it. But to-day at any rate many are rallying to their support. In India to-day the tattered standard is again seen advanced above the din of controversy, that standard on which are displayed the tarnished but not obliterated emblems of “Shree”, goddess of Beauty. The Renaissance of Indian Art is a reality and not an myth—a rebirth of hearts; and who can tell whither this awakened spirit may lead?

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

Perhaps the turn of the tide—the vigorous challenge of the disciples of Beauty to their opponents, has come too late to save the Prabhus' Gospel of Art for the benefit of mankind. But memory is a magician as well as a historian, a reviver as well as a recorder. The memory (jasmine-scented) of India's Past of Art is breathing life into the ashes of to-day. A flower is beginning to bloom where no flowers have bloomed for many a lustrum—a whisper is going abroad—a perfume is in the air. India is trembling to the thrill of the realisation of the magnitude of her long-neglected inheritance,—of the value of those qualities which she has too long slighted, of the incomparable boon of an inherent power. So, although the Prabhus' artistic creed may disintegrate beneath the soulless combinations of practical modernism, yet its message shall not be extirpated. "That which hath wings shall tell the matter", and the sand-pictures of the girl-artists shall be talked of in Heaven (as the dying artist Blake believed *his* despised works were talked of) long after they have been swept for the last time from the walls of the Hindu houses, and from the stones of the Hindu verandahs.

There may be some who will see in this wholly inadequate study of a remarkable Community little more than a glorification of the Fairy Tale. But what is the Fairy Tale if not the word of Truth?

THE GIFT OF PERPETUAL YOUTH

Is it not because we have lost faith in the Fairy Tale that we have lost faith in ourselves, and in each other, so that we have substituted systems for persons, and sown in our hearts a heavy distrust of Individualism? A child is the perfect Individualist and draws its own conclusions, no matter what the World's gathered wisdom may prove to the contrary; and the strange thing is that the child so often comes nearer to the truth than its seniors! For this very reason it is that, as we progress in Life, we return by imperceptible stages to the abandoned Fairy Tale of our youth; the only difference being that what we read once with laughter we re-peruse with tears. And we return to the real home of those early imaginings, with a heartfelt sigh as we cross the shining threshold, while a wave of contentment comes over us, and we demand no longer the proofs for which we have been searching all our lives. Fairyland is Man's true Home;—this is our country—the only country that really exists, beautiful beyond comparison; and here we will seat ourselves—now that we have learned our error—here, by this crystal stream, and nevermore be tired, or sad.

India is to a very appreciable degree nearer to Fairyland than are the Countries of the West, and it is natural that India should remind us on all sides of that grievous loss of our artistic and imaginative birthright which every man in middle life

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY

has to deplore. But blended with this reminder comes consolation—the knowledge that we are not alone in the aspirations and longings which the hateful rush of modern existence has overwhelmed like a torrent but has never altogether suppressed; the knowledge that two hundred million people in India live nearer to that lovable immaterial world from which we have excluded ourselves.

We long to lose ourselves among the throng of those who have not yet learned to doubt, who believe yet what *we* once believed; and we long to believe it too, once again. We are content to live among them even though as strangers, not admitted to their intimacy,—to be near these Children of the Sun, and to catch from the most imaginative people in the world the reflected jewels of august imagery and glowing symbology which adorn their lives. We cannot live in India without taking to the old Fairy Tales again, and to those still older, still more poetic ones of an older and more poetic Land.

*SANCHI AND THE
INDIAN VIEW-POINT IN ART*

SANCHI AND THE INDIAN VIEW-POINT IN ART

THE COOL INTERIOR of the dark little temple to the North-East of the great Stupa offers a welcome refuge from that fierce and searching artist the Indian sun who boldly spreads his pigments over Sanchi. It is better to seek the shade of this porch and to watch him at work, tirelessly varying his effects on stupa, architrave, and column, than to remain in the open courtyard at the mercy of his fiery brush.

From the doorway the Eastern Gate is seen at its gleaming angle, and though the distance is too great to enable one to discern the details, yet the sun helpfully gilds those protuberances which explain the principal forms, while multitudes of small figures and wealth of sculptured ornament resolve themselves into a rich but not confused encrustation of the stone. Behind the gateway our narrow doorway permits a view of the swelling segment of the dome of the Great Stupa and even a glimpse of the triple umbrella on its crest. Westward we can see the chaste and austere columns that to this day attest the sway that

SANCHI AND VIEW-POINT IN ART

Greece held for a time over Indian Art. Ten of these pillars seem to hover over the terrace, a swan-like fraternity, and one lies prone. The smaller Temple of Gupta design nestles confidently beneath their protection like the gentle Eliza of the Fairy Tale beneath the wings of the eleven swans that were her brothers. Beyond them there is nothing but the sense of void and the blue jungles of Salamalpur outlined upon the bluer sky above. Such is our field of vision, and the gaps and omissions in its natural features are indicative of those we shall find when examining its forms and fantasies more closely—missing clues that but give additional charm to the stately ruin; for all can fill in these lacunæ as they wish. The symbology of Sanchi is beautiful, but the tracing of it in its devious course cannot be of main interest to the art-loving visitor. Nor will he easily believe that symbolism was a *prime* motive of Sanchi's sculptors in their handling of their chisels upon her Eastern Gate. The fiery religious zeal of Renaissance Italy with all her pictorial symbols does not seem to have deterred her artists from becoming better painters than preachers, true to their kind as decorators rather than as missionaries; so that Signorelli could not help himself from utilising his sacred themes as vehicles chiefly for his discoveries in the art of drawing from the Life; and the admirers of Fra Bartolommeo

SANCHI AND VIEW-POINT IN ART

sadly removed from the church wall his masterly but too alluring St. Sebastian !

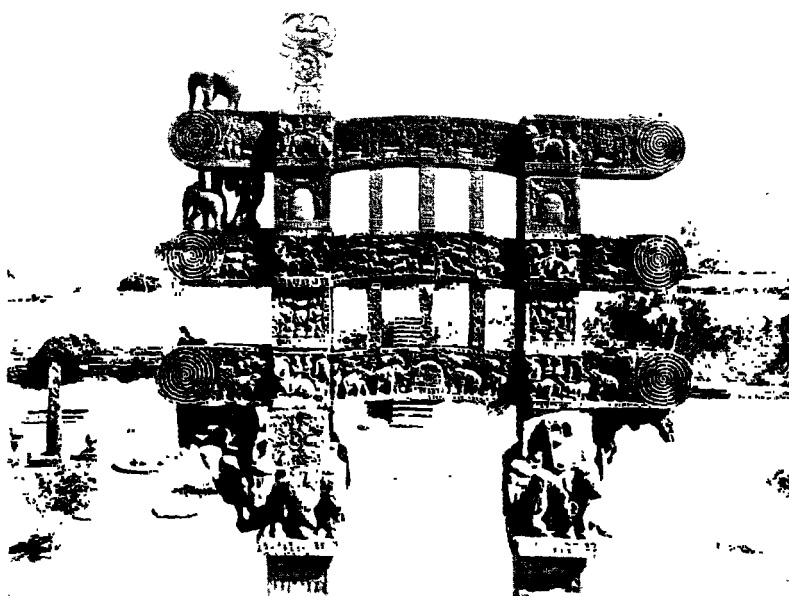
When Art becomes the slave of a didactic purpose it is liable to become banal if not wholly barbarous ; for though Religious story, Symbolism, or History may serve to move the artist to action they cannot alone suffice to guide his hand. The moment he has commenced to work Art will step in and take the reins of genius from all three. We need but recall Titian's Mary Magdalene whose glowing charms are certainly not those of any Saint—however repentant, or the Venetian festival of Veronese which he styled the Supper in Cana of Galilee, or the Madonna of Correggio who bears so close a resemblance to his Venus, to realise the undisputed obedience which Art has exacted from her votaries in Europe. We should not be surprised to find that India's Buddhist artists were governed by the same immutable law ; that they showed their supremacy in the vitality and independence of their creations, and, like the enthusiastic artists they were, often utilised Religious themes as an excuse for rather than as the end and aim of their productions. Before venturing to cross the glaring courtyard to take a closer view of the work of these artists let us sum up the larger symbolism as we may if instructed read it from this doorway. We are told that the great domed temple called the stupa

SANCHI AND VIEW-POINT IN ART

(or tope) represents the city; and the circum-ambient gallery the people who are its inhabitants. The surrounding balustrade that connects the four gateways (in this instance quite devoid of ornament such as beautifies the lowest stupa) stands for the outer wall of the city. This Leviathan of Architectural Seas,—rugged yet titanic, and powerful like the whale—is solid throughout, and in the monster's ossified heart are the relics of Saints. The grass-grown dome was once covered with plaster, some of which still remains, and the rough sides of undressed stone were formerly gay with garlands in relief.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

The Indian Sculptors recognised the sun as their Master, and worked in collaboration, not in competition with, him. If we approach the gateway, this truth will begin to have a special meaning for us, and to test it further we have but to ascend the flight of steps opposite. From the platform the results of this art-producing partnership between “Surya” and Man is revealed in its magnitude. “Surya” was the teacher; the artists, his pupils, followed his dictates with rare and even meticulous skill. Across the intervening space of forty yards or so we can easily descry the majestic forms of the Elephant Capitals—the magnificent right-hand bracket, and



THE EASTERN GATE SANCHI (FROM THE GREAT STUPA).

SANCHI AND VIEW-POINT IN ART

the main features of the panels carved on the architraves and columns. In the earlier hours of the morning the fine judicious carving is thrown into highest relief. The afternoon sun leaves a half-tone over this gateway, which it sharply edges with a vivid sidelight that invests with a thrill of mystery the wonderful bracket, the elephants, and the remaining symbol of the Buddhist Faith that trident-like surmounts the highest parallel. We enter and climb the stairs to the gallery of the stupa to view the rear of the gateway's trebled lintel, a living series of figures in sun-gilt stone relieved and explained by the crisp blue shadows :—

In the elder days of Art,
Builders wrought with greatest care
Each minute and unseen part ;
For the Gods see everywhere.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

If the old Indian artists learned relief and colour from the sun, they must have acquired the knowledge of form and proportion exemplified by the Eastern Gate from the study of Nature herself. The seven sculptured panels on the right-hand column are the Seven Heavens. It is well that we know the subject of these panels because of the very anthropomorphic rendering of the celestial forms that surround Buddha himself. The fourth and sixth panels contain particularly

SANCHI AND VIEW-POINT IN ART

lovely figures of resplendent women—presumably Apsarâs—in the most natural of momentary poses. Here we catch a glimpse of bangle-circled arms reaching upward to pluck rich clusters of fruits hanging from laden boughs, there of shapely busts bedecked with pendants, or the graceful outlines of jewel-girdled thighs, and those ever-recurring wondrous head-dresses varied with loving, incredible invention.

A book might be written about the hundreds of different *coiffures* of the Women of Sanchi. The Heavens are crowded with them and their jocund wearers; for what is this but the old chivalrous Woman-worship of the Ajanta Caves, in stone this time instead of paint? In the panel that represents Buddha walking on the water (on the opposite column) Nature is admitted for a change in some of her non-feminine aspects. The inimitable action of the two monkeys perched in the fruit tree is as full of humour as it is replete with all the qualities of selective observation. We shall study the love of animals further when we pass again within and look at the hosts of Jungle beasts that are worshipping the Illumination of Buddha so devoutly on the interior side of the second architrave; and later when we visit Sanchi's Museum and see the marvellous elephant that kneels to adore Buddha's feet.

In the squares that adorn or separate the archi-

SANCHI AND VIEW-POINT IN ART

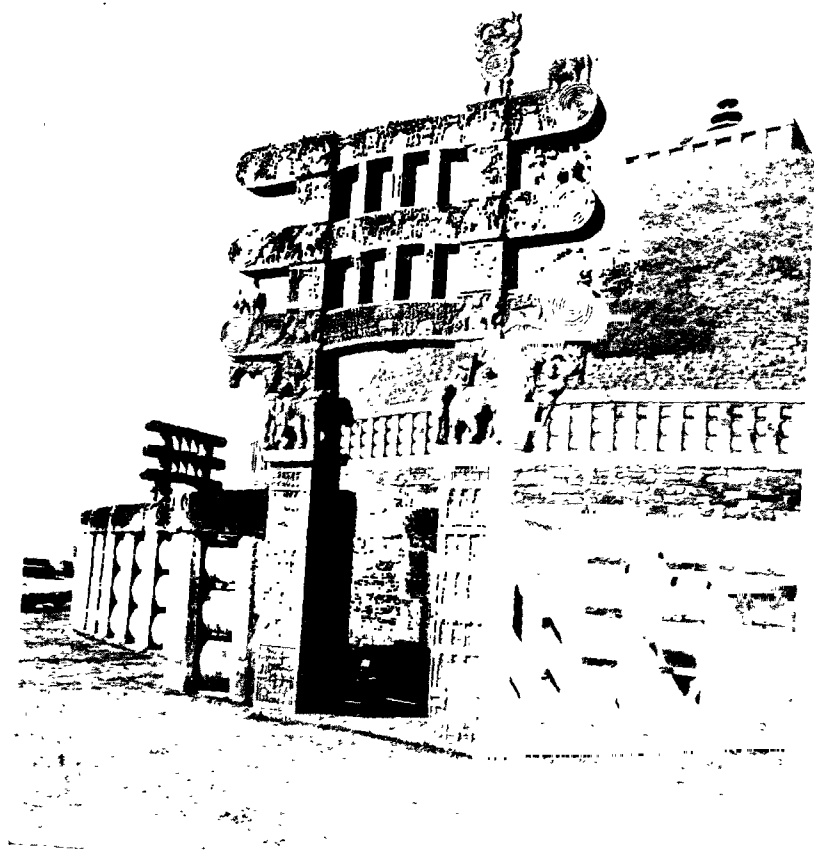
traves the Decorative and Realistic are sometimes most happily conjoined, as in the panel representing the Elephants bathing the Mother of Buddha, who, my Indian friends assure me, may just as probably be Lakshmi. The three winged lions below are a wholly decorative concession, as are the symbolic signs and flowers which enrich the outer sides of the two columns of the gateway. But great as these decorations are, the reigning Deity of the Eastern Gate is surely she who forms the right-hand bracket just beneath the lowest architrave. Here, if anywhere, is one's chance to grasp in its fullest perfection that deification of Humanity that was the great attainment of the Indian artists of Sanchi.

The conception of this sculptured figure and its appositeness to its purpose are bold and delightful in the extreme. What could be better as an anterior support to the great sculptured bar, than this tree that rises and spreads so naturally from the massive group of elephants upon the capital, and its festoons of heavy foliage and mangoes? And, to make a third side of the necessary triangle, what more natural than the exuberant form of the Woman—or Dryad—who, with one hand firmly grasping the fruit-laden branch above, and the other linked in a curving offshoot of the main stem, bursts upon our view leaning joyously earthward with the daring in-

SANCHI AND VIEW-POINT IN ART

difference of youthful security? Her right foot is firmly advanced upon the bough and the toes cling to their support with almost prehensile strength and great realism, while the other foot is carelessly withdrawn into the fork of the tree as in a momentary pause in the forward swaying, of the supple form. Almost to the knees the limbs are ringed with anklets; the light wisp of drapery blowing to one side that serves to accentuate the grand line of the hip is one of those "tags" of gossamer material that are the most prevalent and original feature of the unique Ajanta Cave costumes; it is the only vestige of drapery. The heavy ear ornaments, armlets, necklace, and girdle enrich but do not conceal the all-conquering and triumphant nudity. There exists not a trace either of the arrogance of immodesty or the diffidence of false shame in this arboreal Beauty. The light in which the ancient Indian artists envisaged Woman was serene, frank, and generous, like that of the evening sun that scatters its gold so profusely to carpet Sanchi. Within no mean or narrow compass but in the palace of their spacious souls did they enshrine her, and so they thus enskied her image—the immortal symbol of all Beauty—stamped, as was fitting, in everlasting stone, and outlined against the blue background of Heaven.

★ ★ ★ ★ ★



THE EASTERN GATE, SANCHI.

SANCHI AND VIEW-POINT IN ART

That is the obverse of Sanchi's finest detail—now let us take the reverse. To do so we follow our guide the sun, who will lead us in the noon behind the gateway and up into the gallery of the stupa. In the morning the light shone from without; now it shines as it were from within, so that standing on the narrow terrace and peeping over the high balustrade we might imagine the outer scene as irradiated by the relic-bearing heart of the Great Stupa. The light is now on the back of the Dryad and shows her to be not less beautiful in this than in her other aspect. But this view teaches us a different lesson, which those who would understand Indian Art would do well to con and to lay up rememberingly in their hearts. The art of the Sculptor is here made clearer, as though he were willing to place the key of the riddle in the hands of those who cared to seek it *within* the Golden Gate. We cannot solve the mystery of Genius but can usefully try to learn the mortal part of its work,—that is, the means employed by the Master in the making of this figure. The artist evidently viewed his problem—primarily as one of Architectural decoration. He had to make a triangle and then to hide with art the scientific fact of its existence. So he carved this figure, and, standing behind it, we are also to some extent behind the mind of the Master watching its workings.

SANCHI AND VIEW-POINT IN ART

The silhouette being the fundamental motive of the work, note how the interstices between the arms, head, and waist, and the branched tree form in themselves beautiful patterns, which might be copied as freehand forms of charmed irregularity. Remember that from the front view these open spaces, through which we are now looking downward upon the grass-grown courtyard, are filled in with purest turquoise, and that the figure now simply sun-tinted was once ochered over with colour. How simply every feature not essential to the outline is treated ! The fan of unbound hair spreads Egyptian-wise in rippling lines as the main adornment of the form. But what majesty has been achieved by that consummate outline itself we shall perceive if we simply trace it as a map, and so mark the nobility and expressiveness of its contours and angles. This is one side—the Decorative side of Indian Art ; but we shall discover from the study of this Dryad of Sanchi that triune entity of which Indian Art consists—a sublime union of the purely Decorative, the Realistic, and the purely Spiritual. This is felt rather than seen ; for the differences between the one and the other are to be found not in the fields of artistic knowledge, however wide, but in the Terra Incognita of Taste. She of Sanchi in fact conveys in her two aspects the main view-point of India in art and in æsthetics, and this

SANCHI AND VIEW-POINT IN ART

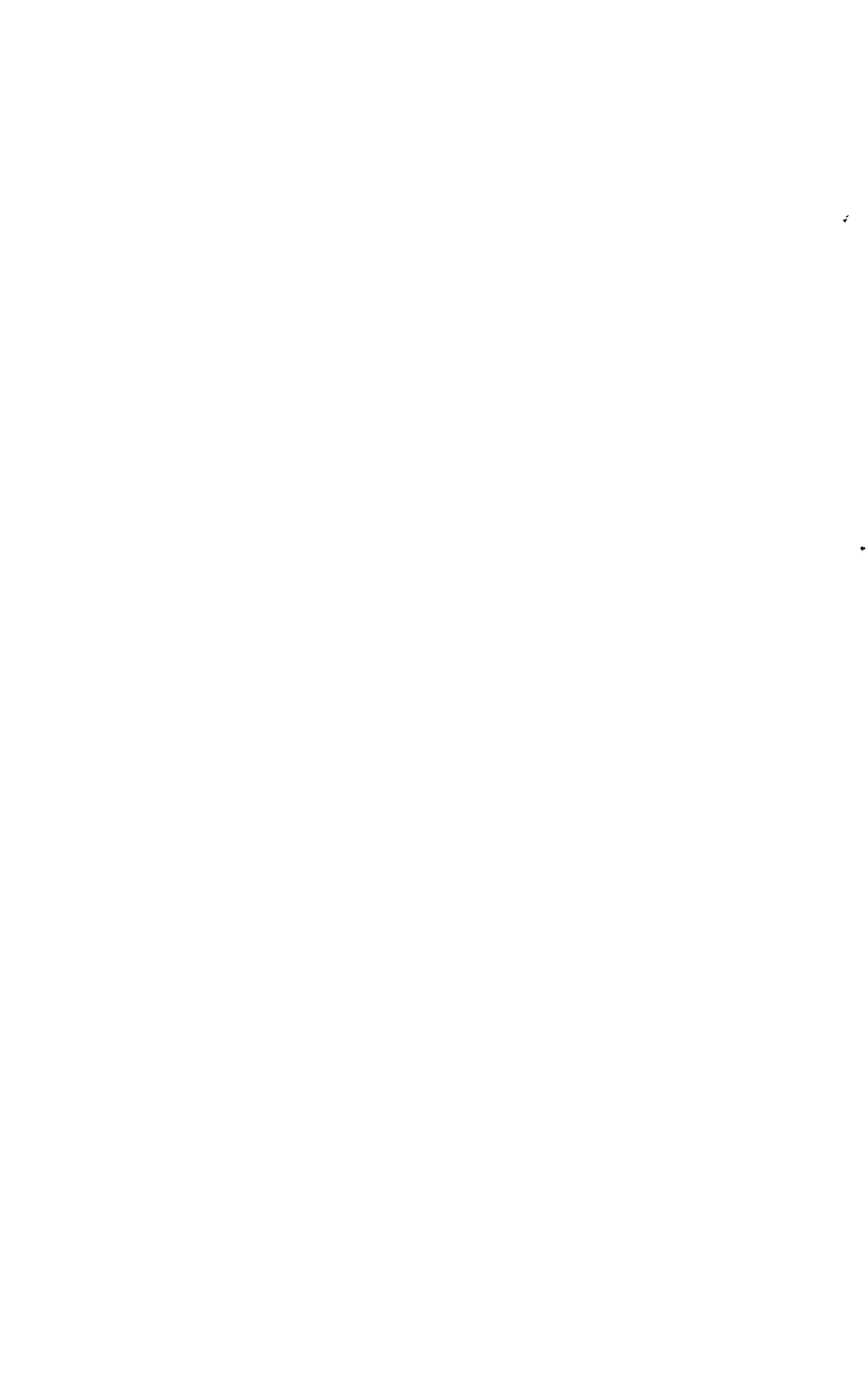
is a matter of vital moment not only to India herself but to the whole World; because the Indian View-point is an asset which mankind may perhaps destroy but can never re-create. The Indian feels this instinctively; hence much of his conservatism, his apparent lack of reciprocity, his unflinching determination to arrest the attrition of his artistic territories by encroaching seas of external influence. It is largely a contest between the affirmations of the Utilitarian and the negations of the Idealist, and the latter will not listen until he is assured that the mansions of his soul shall not be razed in the process of social reconstruction. To many Indians even life itself is not so desirable as to be purchased by the surrender of a portion of that patrimony of Beauty to which the humblest cultivator, his wife, and the bronze cupid who blesses their union are heirs. Theirs is a legacy that dignifies and elevates; that cannot be amassed because it is inherent, because it emanates as much from themselves as from the surroundings of which they are part and parcel. This will help us to appreciate the point of view which makes the Indian artist regard the Cave Temples of Ajanta and the Topes and Gateways of Sanchi not as ruins but as living oracles of Art. He does not so much copy these frescoes, these carvings, as absorb their mighty emanations. He sees

SANCHI AND VIEW-POINT IN ART

things in the same way as did those earlier artists.

There are no "Old Masters" properly speaking in our Indian Galleries because there are none in India. The living semblance is too well known to make one inclined to regard deceased Genius as dead; for ancient powers are delegated to a million skilful Indian fingers to-day. Stirred by a national spirit the old artistic Genius of the Country is beginning its new "Avatâra"; and both Eastern and Western observers are welcoming the wonderful Renaissance that has begun as a new impetus for art. The stable artistic traditions of India cannot but prove invaluable to a World that has committed the Image of Art to the melting-pot. Shall that Image finally emerge from the ordeal, fearful in form as the monster of Frankenstein, or adorable as the goddess Shree?

^ *THE INDIAN ART STUDENT*



I

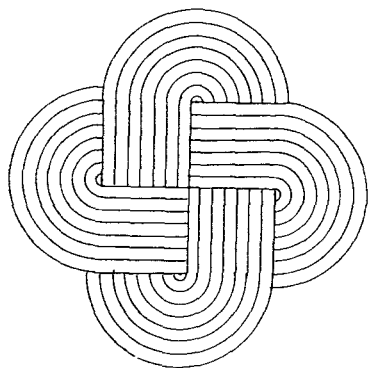
AS THE INTERPRETER

THERE IS A STORY told of a man who was so deeply interested in the study of certain manifestations of Oriental Art that he was able to declare that a Kashmir shawl in his possession consisted of precisely so many stitches. This is accuracy but is it knowledge? One feels that this enthusiast would have learned far more about Kashmir shawls by simply watching the workers, big and small, seated in rows upon the bare benches and manipulating the innumerable threads with busy fingers. This spirit of particularisation (though in less fanatical form than that mentioned) has led to a widespread belief that Indian Art is a subject mainly for the virtuoso. It is regarded as a very special line, not to be enjoyed without special courses of study, and not to be appreciated by anyone without a knowledge of Hindu Mythology, and of course Sanskrit. The learned might be scandalised at the plain man who dared profess that Indian Art—just like Greek Art,

THE INDIAN ART STUDENT

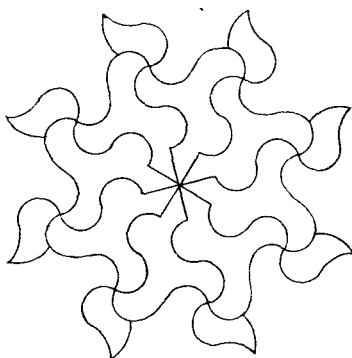
or modern French Art—was quite capable of explaining and of justifying itself to *him*, and that *he* derives a whole world of pleasure from a purely external view of its beauties. It is however a fact that one may (if one dare) enjoy Indian pictures and statues without understanding their literary or Religious intention, just as one may enjoy a bust at the British Museum without knowing or greatly caring whether it be Clyte, or Hebe. I have a Hindu image, a brass statuette, which enchants me, so that I keep it always on my table, and never fail to draw an indefinable sense of pleasure from its proximity, though I have not the slightest idea whether she is an Apsarâ, a Dryad, a Goddess, or a Girl! It must of course be very nice to understand Sanskrit, but it is said that Pope was able to make his translation of Homer without a knowledge of Greek, and we may taste the nectar of Indian Art in its double distilled form, though ignorant of the composition of the ingredients which we find so delicious to our palates. The best of all possible ways of learning about Indian Art, and the most illuminating, is to meet Indian Art students. It is then that one realises the genial humanity which must underlie even the stiffest Indian convention. The Indian Art student is the key to most riddles in Indian Art, the living solution of all the problems of the Past, and the index to those of the Future. We ought to encounter no

100



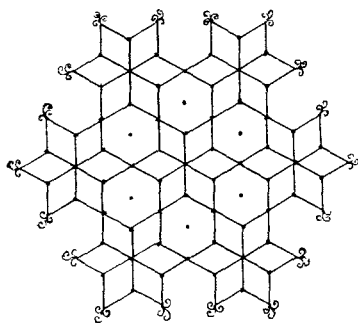
1

GATHODA PATTERN, OR THE BUNDLE.



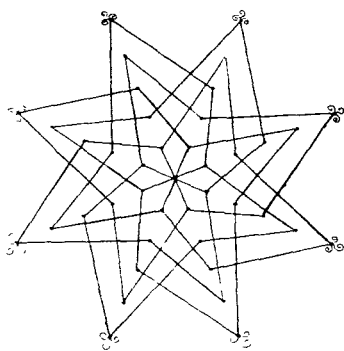
2

SANKHA KAMAL PATTERN, OR THE SHELL-SHAPED LOTUS.



3

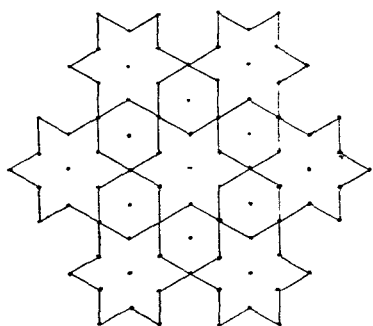
SHEVANTI PATTERN, OR THE CHRYSANTHEMUM.



4

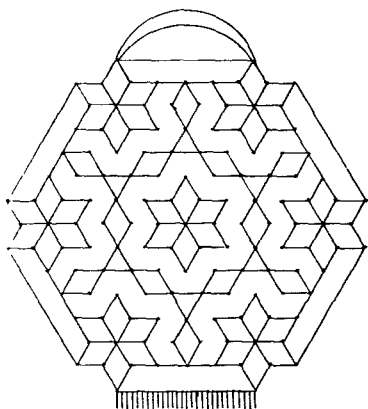
JNYANA KAMAL PATTERN, OR THE LOTUS OF KNOWLEDGE.

DIAGRAMS OF RANGOLI PICTURES.



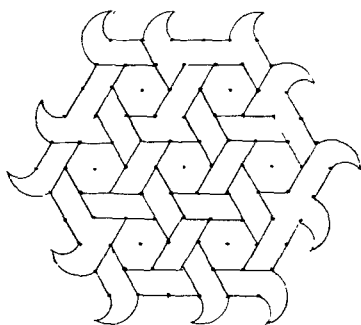
5

SHEWANTI ZELA PATTERN, OR THE
BOUQUET OF CHRYSANTHEMUMS.



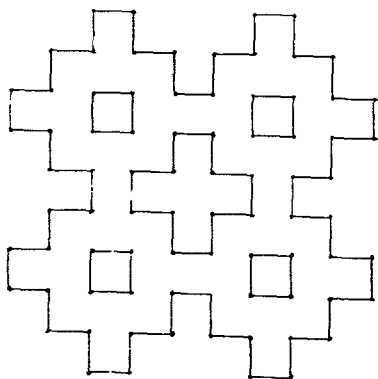
6

AKASHDIVA PATTERN, OR THE
CHINESE LANTERN.



7

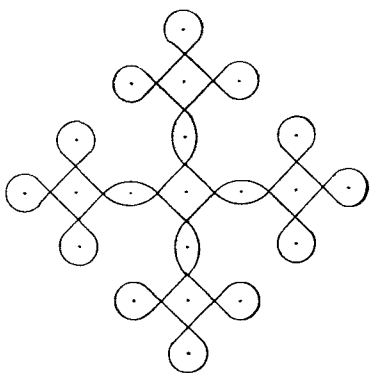
NABHI KAMAL PATTERN, OR
THE NAVEL.



8

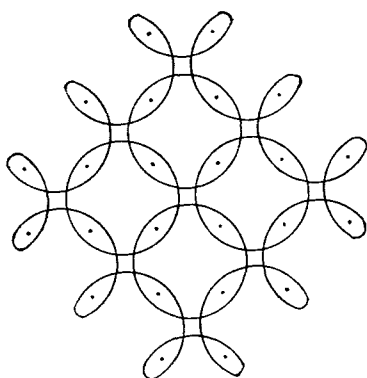
MRIGASAN PATTERN, OR THE
SAGE'S SEAT.

DIAGRAMS OF RÂNGOLI PICTURES.



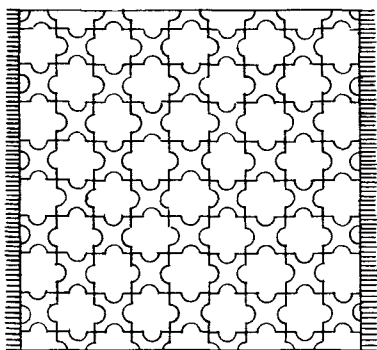
9

BHOOL PATTERN, OR THE PUZZLE



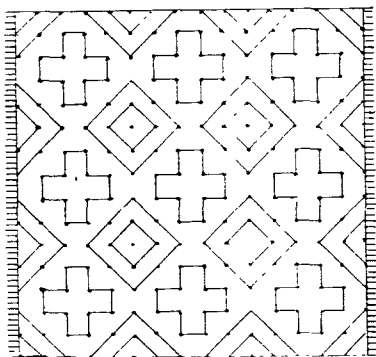
10

BHOOL PATTERN, OR THE PUZZLE.



11

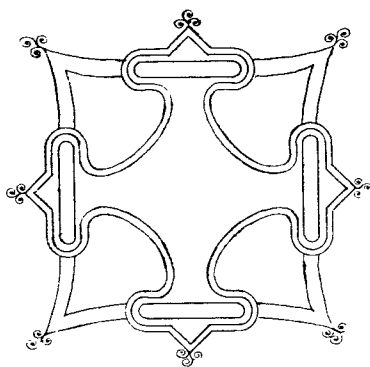
GALICHA PATTERN, OR THE
CARPET OF FLOWERS.



12

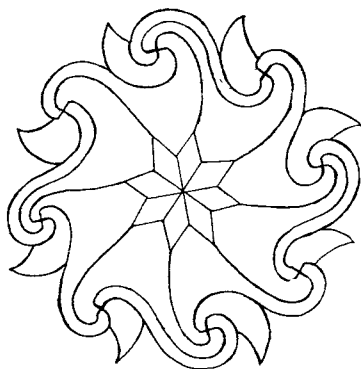
GALICHA PATTERN, OR THE CARPET.

DIAGRAMS OF RÂNGOLI PICTURES.



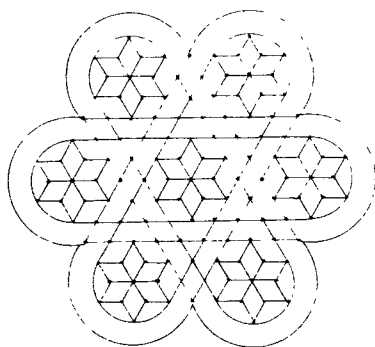
13

MODAKA PATTERN.



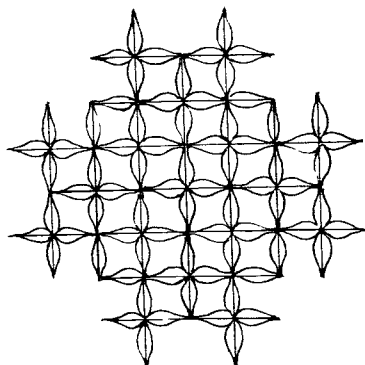
14

TAT PATTERN, OR THE TRAY.



15

CHENDU PATTERN, OR THE BALL.



16

ZELA PATTERN, OR THE
FLOWER BOUQUET.

DIAGRAMS OF RÂNGOLI PICTURES.

AS THE INTERPRETER

insuperable difficulty in our study of the work of his countrymen, through a study of himself. With him by our side we have an interpreter who, however slow to speak,—(and the “Mysterious East” is probably nowhere more impenetrable than in its Indian aspect), is a sensitive medium for the transfusion of the hidden spiritual and artistic influences, which have evolved that singular medley of canonical beauty, and the *bizarre*, which we know as Indian Art. Debarred by ignorance from the use of the literary keys to knowledge, and recoiling perhaps from acquiring these as from a task scarcely less exacting than the self-imposed labour of Borrow’s country recluse who had devoted his life to learning Chinese (and omitted to learn how to read the clock!), we can yet acquire from Indian students an intuitive perception of causes and results which is perhaps the most satisfactory substitute for knowledge itself.

The mystery of the Ajanta Caves will no longer be a mystery to him who has once been privileged to visit that shrine in the company of ardent Indian Art students. They are the most inspiring of cicerones,—the most stimulating of guides! It is an unbounded experience to yield placidly to the spell of that association, to perceive the kinship of the students with paintings and statues, or their love for dim aisles where sacred bulls

THE INDIAN ART STUDENT

wander among crowded worshippers ; for shattered ruins of deserted mosques ; and the tombs of the old Kings. In their refreshing company one lingers too with an added thrill over the picturesque present, and can dwell more knowledgeably upon the living gleam of silk vest, and embroidered saree. Flung by the Indian God of Circumstance, who is a worker of many miracles, into this fellowship, the Western professor will soon begin to distrust the patent by which he holds his title as a teacher. He will discover that the well becomes more profound—if more transparent—the deeper he sounds its depths. The students will lead him into hidden grottos which growing knowledge seems only to expand without end, until he comes to realise the magnitude of this art, and its unassailable secrets, with that sense of relief with which one lays down a burden not unworthily but painfully endured,—or relinquishes, under a legitimate excuse, the task that would probably have proved too difficult.

We stand together within the vast hewings of the cliffs at Ellora, and look upon that mighty temple, incredibly quarried out of hills, sitting there, chariot-like, with all its terrible elephants, battling gods, and winged Apsarâs ; we enter its recesses through the gloom of which glimmers some Brodingnagian statue ; where columns of sculptured rock are gilded by shafts of sunlight

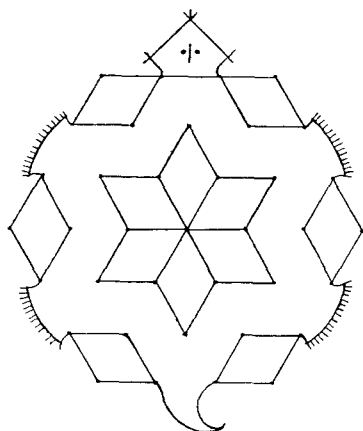
AS THE INTERPRETER

of rosier hues than the cathedral's oriel ; and though we have visited these places before, and alone, yet in the company of the students these dead precincts seem somehow to have become alive ! Our surroundings seem to be tenanted by unseen forms, austere, or coy ; and even the green parrots which nest in the cliffs and glance like living emeralds overhead, seem something more than mere birds,—perhaps the souls of the artists who died in the making of these works ! At moments of supernatural stillness when the setting sun throws red gold into the lap of the temple, as the departing visitor in an Eastern theatre may throw a handful of coins to the most celebrated of the dancers, it almost seems as though we can see, glancing from behind the urn of some noble pillar festooned about with chiselled garlands, an eye more liquid and enticing than the brightest on this earth ; that the abysses of gloom beyond are filled with strange flashings as of ringlets even blacker than the surrounding shadows—with sparklings, as of enormous earrings, ropes of pearls, carcanets, and jewelled girdles ; and that tinkling music, as of invisible anklets, falls audibly upon our enlightened ears !

I recall an occasion which may well be recorded as significant of that persistence in Indian Art of the undying spark. It so happened that among

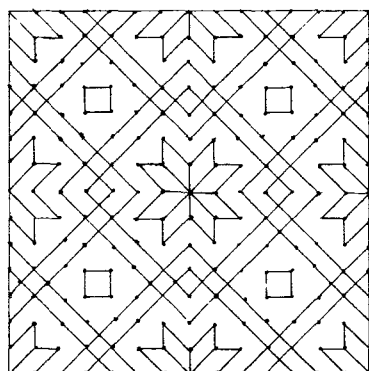
THE INDIAN ART STUDENT

several mural paintings which had to be undertaken by the students some triangular panels were to be filled. When looking at these and surrounded by students of the Bombay School of Art I had a fancy for something analogous to those old grotesques which are so singular a decorative feature of the Ajanta frescoes. We might of course have copied, with the modifications necessary, some old *motif*, but we felt that an *original* design was wanted, yet one that should belong to that old impish art. Murmuring something about "grotesques" and "ornaments" I looked round among the students, who had been engaged in painting a matter-of-fact "Head from Life" in matter-of-fact class-room style. There was nothing in the *work* of some twenty students to suggest more than the realistic power and efficiency of handling which the subject of study demanded. Nothing to show that these wielders of a normal brush which distinguished tone values, and perspective, and which kept a level sense of proportion throughout—could for the gratifying of my wish slough these acquirements and convert the up-to-date hog's hair into an implement of wonder-working power. To say that there was no indication of these protean possibilities in the twenty canvases upon the easels is not to say that there were none among the students *themselves*. Too well was I assured of



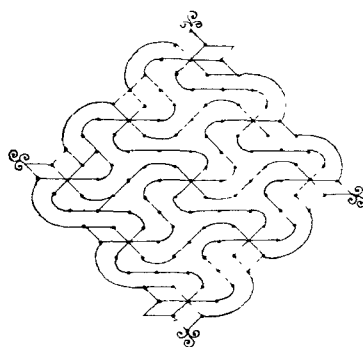
17

KASAV PATTERN, OR THE TORTOISE.



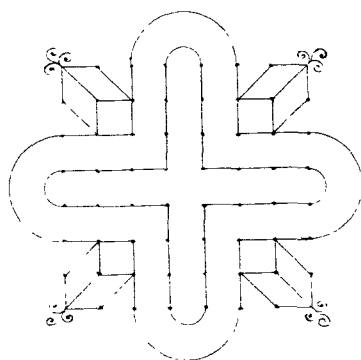
18

ANANT ASANA PATTERN, OR THE
SEAT OF THE ANANT FLOWERS.



19

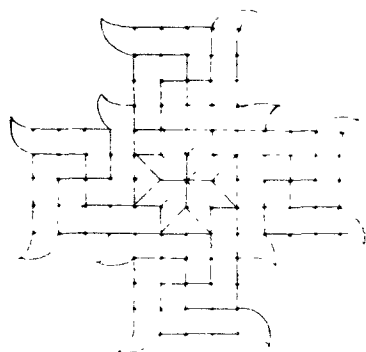
KYARI PATTERN, OR THE CREEPER.



20

VAISHVADEV KUND PATTERN, OR
THE FIREPLACE.

DIAGRAMS OF RANGOLI PICTURES.



21

SWASTIKA WITH LOTUS PATTERN.

22

VARIABLE SHAPE PATTERN OF THE
TEAR-SHAPED LOTUS.

DIAGRAMS OF RÂNG LU PICTURES.

AS THE INTERPRETER

the existence, within that little group, of concealed powers, to doubt that somewhere or other close beside me lurked the queer dragons and monsters which my soul craved to see materialise upon these panels. The difficulty was, as Time was pressing, to decide which of these young men held within him the secret of the hidden lore. The politeness, the diffidence of the Indian Art student (as with the artist) often holds him back—or (in the latter case particularly) urges him to obtrude his “European” capacities upon one’s notice rather than his Indian ones. This is due to a fine sense of the fitting—possibly inaccessible to the bustling young men of the West, but very palpable to sensitive Indian intuitions. Knowing that I could expect little help in making my selection from those most able to help me, I glanced at the eager faces in turn—trying to read there the traces of that which I was seeking. And—(this was one of those great guesses of life, that one may pardonably brag about a little)—*I found it!* Not all at once certainly; but it spoke curiously, but (as I think now) *unmistakably*, from the large slightly prominent eyes of a tall rather lanky student, who with his “Gandhi” cap, white “dhoti”, and rather shambling style was craning his long neck to look at the empty cartoon on the floor over the heads of his comrades. I asked this student if he could fill the

THE INDIAN ART STUDENT

triangle with a weird design. He said he could, staring at the white paper all the while with comprehending eyes. I asked to see his head study. He showed it to me; there was nothing weird about it; just a head not quite so well painted as some of the others. Still his eyes had impressed me. They were the eyes of one who *might* have looked upon dragons in his time; I made up my mind; and to him the task was assigned. This young man, when once he had started on his congenial task, was a revelation to us all. From the shy, diffident, and rather clumsy, though conscientious muddler of the class-room he had suddenly become the brilliant exponent of the most delightful ghouls and goblins that one could possibly wish to meet. His demons were most satisfying, and completely demoniacal. There was no scepticism possible when looking at them. They impressed with a sincerity which mingled with their ugliness and dissolved it. The result of the mixture was *Beauty*—for he had rubbed shoulders too with Apsarâs and Gandharvâs; and through all these illustrations of that fantastic world in which his mind moved, a candid inner light seemed to prevail. He set about drawing his designs with a certainty of hand which it was a joy to witness, a hand that would travel over the surface in bold sweeping lines, that never lost its control of the

AS THE INTERPRETER

brush, or pencil, and with mystical rapidity limned an elephant, a buffalo, a monkey ; or an arabesque of queer fish-tailed land creatures, disporting themselves among curling flesh-like filaments of unholy plants, that can only carpet the floor of the Deepest Sea.

II

AS THE HUMORIST

I BELIEVE THAT NEARLY every Indian Art student possesses a gift for the Grotesque ; although the finest ebullitions of that sense are as rare as the higher grades of any kind of artistic talent must be anywhere. In its fullest flower Indian Art possesses a vein of delicious *diablerie* that is unique. The Indian is a great humorist as well as a great tragedian (have not these antitheses always co-existed in the prime exponents of either?), and his sombre phase is too often regarded as most characteristic. But those who have witnessed a large social gathering of the Art students—past and present—in Bombay, are astonished at the spirit of mirth and jollity that prevails,—the laughter, the merriment, and the zest. Many of the panels on the walls and ceilings of the Ajanta Caves are obviously playful in their intention. Certain Mughal portraits clearly show that the artist in spite of all discretion must have been highly tickled with his subject, such as the picture of that famous fat personage riding on his ridiculously lean horse

108

AS THE HUMORIST

of which so many replicas exist, and which would seem to have no European counterpart unless we can imagine Sancho Panza mounted for a change upon Rozinante ! Certain veins of Indian humour, equally difficult to parallel, have by their very unusualness led the incredulous to question whether the Indian is really a humorist at all. But these instances, such as some of the tales of Krishna in his more roguish aspects at which many Indians will chuckle,—to the bewilderment of most Europeans,—are not more representative of the field of Indian humour as a whole than is the drollery of the great Elizabethans (“the somewhat dead humour of those days” as a modern critic has it), typical of British jocularity. Indeed it seems to me that there is a strain in the histrionic if not in the graphic arts of India akin to the humour of Tudor times. One seems very distinctly to trace a comparison when looking at some of the new, *really Indian*, films which are such an interesting recent development. At one such Exhibition I saw a scene in which a troop of Râkshasâs or demons annoyed the bad man of the piece, and the incident reminded one, in the character of its almost “Gothic” demonology and its bustling farce, (which was greeted with great applause by a large audience) of scenes such as that in *The Tempest* where Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban are pinched black and blue by the punitive spirits,

THE INDIAN ART STUDENT

or where Falstaff is assailed by the mummers in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. This frank-hearted fun is again very far removed from those whimsical Indian tales which are certainly not intended to be wholly mirth-provoking, but which do possess for European ears, and I think for Indian ears also, a delightful strangeness not unmingled with humour. Such instances of the whimsical are numerous, but one will suffice to illustrate the quaintness of these conceptions. When the forest of Khândava was set on fire by Agni, assisted by the heroes Arjuna and Krishna, nearly every living creature within it perished in the conflagration. Among the birds one of them, Jaritâ by name (who had been abandoned by her mate), found herself at her wits' end as to how to save her little ones, who were not yet covered with feathers, from the flames which were rapidly approaching the maternal nest. She laments her evil plight, and voices her despair, but the infant birds exhort her to save herself and leave them to their fate. Then Jaritâ has an idea; she says, "There is a hole here in the ground near the tree, belonging to a mouse. Enter this hole without loss of time. You shall have then no fear of fire. After ye have entered it I shall, ye children, cover its mouth with dust. This is the only means of escape that I see from the blazing fire".

The infant birds reply,—“Without feathers we

AS THE HUMORIST

are but so many balls of flesh. If we enter the hole certain it is that the carnivorous mouse will destroy us all. . . . A death by fire is preferable to being eaten up. If we are devoured by the mouse within the hole, that death is certainly ignoble, whereas the destruction of the body in fire is approved by the wise”.

Jaritâ now explains that,—“The little mouse that had come out of this hole was seized by a hawk with his claws and carried away hence”. She therefore entreats her children to enter the hole. But they cautiously reply,—“We are not by any means certain of that mouse having been taken away by the hawk. There may be other mice living here”. They add that perhaps the fire will not reach them after all, and advise their Mother once more to escape, so that if she lives she may obtain other children as good. The Mother reasserts that she saw the mighty hawk swoop down and fly away with the mouse from the hole, and afterwards devour it, and that therefore the children may enter the hole trustfully. The little birds however object,—“O Mother, we do not by any means know that the mouse hath been carried away by the hawk. We cannot enter this hole in the ground without being certain of the fact”. To which their Mother responds,—“I know to a certainty that the mouse hath been carried away by the hawk. Therefore,

THE INDIAN ART STUDENT

ye children, ye have nothing to fear ; do what I say !” The precocious young ones however make this amazing answer,—“ We do not, O Mother, say that thou art dispelling our fears with a false story ! For whatever is done by a person when his reason hath been disturbed can scarcely be said to be that person’s deliberate act. . . . Thou art young and handsome. Go unto thy husband. Thou shalt obtain good children again. Let us by entering the fire attain to regions of felicity. If, however, the fire consume us not, thou mayest come back and obtain us again”. Poor Jaritâ having done her best at last flies away. The children now invoke Agni (the God of fire), who spares them ; and eventually they are reunited with both their parents. Before this happy event however the infant birds make a last request of Agni which is refreshingly natural,—“ O Sukra, these cats trouble us every day. O Hutâshana, consume them with their friends and relatives !”¹

The artistic interest of this story (which is only very partially given here) lies not in the philosophy which it embodies but in the fact that the whole scene is conceived as being enacted by birds² and not by persons. Its incongruity is its

¹ See *The Mahabharata*, translated by Pratapa Chandra Roy, C.I.E., Section CCXXXI (Khandava-daha Parva), p. 444.

² The infant birds were Rishis (Sages). Their Father was the Saint Manda-pala disguised as a bird.

AS THE HUMORIST

charm. It is the same charm as that of the painter of the aforementioned goblins. Indian Art students frequently show in their designs and sketches this special sense of the whimsical. I recall in particular a mural panel of the "Dhobies" (as the washers of clothes are termed) in which the student who painted it, while careful to maintain his decorative intention, had caught the spirit of the rollicking scallywags with their huge bundles on their backs, in a manner that no one but an Indian could accomplish. The same student, on one occasion, when we were all at a loss as to the sort of object which was required to make a "point" in a large composition, startled the class by suddenly interjecting in a deep voice the fateful words, "A billygoat!"—and a goat it was! The broader humour of caricature is separated but a step from these other manifestations, and it is brilliantly demonstrated by certain modern Indian artists, and fully appreciated by the Public. No Art student's festival is complete without its witty recitations, impersonations (in which the sacred persons of the Masters are not spared!), songs, and rattling farce.

In spite of this however the broadest elements of humour are conspicuous by their absence from the work of the students. A delicate vein of irony appears again and again, and a playfulness of invention is perceivable in much of their best work.

THE INDIAN ART STUDENT

But they have not yet learned to make art the medium for the coarser pleasantries which it is in Europe, and I am not sure that such graphic buffoonery would be understood by them. The witty "spicy" element in painting or drawing is never seen at all in the work of Indian artists : but the humour of faithfully rendered models, true to the type they represent, is well understood in the very realistic *ateliers* of some of the Bombay sculptors. In Painting the humorist will insist upon preserving the decorative sense (which pervades all Indian Art) at the expense of the sense of humour if need be. But realism is a strong feature of the Bombay sculptor, and he can let himself go when he has such types before him as a tipsy man, a usurer, a mistry (carpenter), a street urchin, or an old mendicant. These are the butts of his wit and he models them with a full-blooded chuckling appreciation of all their droll qualities.

III

AS THE SUPERHUMAN REALIST

NOTHING SEEMS TO HAVE troubled the critics of Modern Indian Art, and especially of the modern Indian Art student more than the marked ability which the latter has developed to paint natural objects in a natural manner. This talent has been variously condemned (chiefly it may be said by non-Indians) as partaking of "foreign influence" and as being un-Indian in style. As Bombay has become noted for this kind of painting and sculpture, that devoted city has had to endure a fiery scrutiny of its artistic activities and to listen to many loud admonitions that its artists ought not to paint like Europeans. A wide area of sweeping generalisations will have to be demolished in showing that these critics are mistaken in their conclusions, for the criticism is founded upon an erroneous estimate of Indian Art as a whole. Indian Art does *not* consist entirely of Jain sculptures. It is not made up of an endless procession of many-handed gods and goddesses. Nor is it committed to a series of vain repetitions as was Egyptian Art in its later

THE INDIAN ART STUDENT

phases ; it is not static, nor is it reactionary. Its decorative and religious conventions as understood by Indian artists allow of an infinite number of variations. The Jain sculptures would be recognised anywhere in Europe as Indian, but to say that they *are* Indian Art would be scarcely fairer to India than the assertion that the works of Fuseli, Zoffany, Angelica Kauffmann, and Gibson are representative of European Art would be to Europe. The vast distances, differences, variations, and contrasts in the Continent of India are of course reflected in the art of that great country. This is not to say that in the whole circle of India's Art we shall not observe a *something* which does subtly unite all its segments. But that elusive link should not be confounded with any particular period ; it is found in all periods of India's artistic history. We shall find it in the Ajanta, and Ellora Caves, in the Taj, and the Fort at Delhi, in the Tombs of Bijapur, the sculptures of Southern India, the paintings of Mahomedans and Hindus, the nature-taught drawings of the Indian women, and the class-work and home-work of the Indian Art students of to-day. The anxiety of some Western critics lest India in this progressive phase of her art should become de-Indianised should no doubt be very flattering to India's artists ;—but they are not likely to accept definitions as to the scope of their pencils ; and not very likely perhaps

AS THE SUPERHUMAN REALIST

as denizens of a country whose art has successfully risen above the invasions, vanquishments, tyrannies, persecutions, holocausts, religious controversies, and political earthquakes of two thousand years to refuse to benefit by the percolations of knowledge from whatever source, and by the re-acquisition of those fuller facilities that, thanks to the Government's patronage, are coming their way. Foreigners may, and do, distraint very liberally upon India's artistic treasures ; but India's Art is not a second Golden Fleece hung on the branches of a golden-fruited tree in another Garden of the Hesperides to be ravished by our modern Argonauts. Facilities for Indian Art students to enable them to work out their own salvation in their own way, to Indian artists to explore *all* fields of artistic expression is less likely to end in the killing of any one Indian convention than in evolving twenty new ones as beautiful as any of those of the past.

The desire for Realism which at the present time is one, and only one, of the many directions in which Indian Art is feeling forward is by no means new, though the advent of photography among other things has given this desire a new impulse. In spite of that hall-mark of frigidity which is so jealously prized by those who only recognise its severer religious phases Indian Art is *permeated* with Realism. As we trace this art backwards all the way to its ancient Dravidian

THE INDIAN ART STUDENT

exponents we shall never lose sight of this feature, though at certain periods the conventional frame becomes too heavy for the picture it encloses. This being so is not the Realism of the Bombay Art student more likely to lead to the new Ajanta than the lifeless or sterile copying of great originals? It is true that the decorative sense of the West has suffered under the inroads of the seekers after verisimilitude in art, but the West is not India. The swift fluctuations of its numerous artistic maelstroms may no more be matched with the slow-moving river of Indian Art than the Ganges with the Thames; and the rising tide will not mean the obliteration of old landmarks but rather the irrigating of the parched land by refreshing waters. I do not believe that the thirst for Realism will ever outrun the imaginative element in Indian Art. I believe that the latter remains as it has ever been the guardian-sense in the Indian artist's mind. In Realism he simply recognises another whetstone on which to sharpen the bright edge of his pictorial fancy.

If we would disprove the Indian students' right to study form in the "European" style (as it is termed) we must deny the beauty of the Sanchi sculptures and the Ajanta frescoes, both born of the union of nature-study and decorative feeling. That æsthetic marriage must have been celebrated in the first dim dawn of the

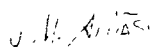
118

AS THE SUPERHUMAN REALIST

Indian consciousness. Its literary as well as its artistic offspring are legion, for the literary, decorative and graphic arts are of one family in India, where no protest has yet been raised against the despised "subject picture", and where the adjective "anecdotal" has not yet become a journalistic bomb capable of blowing the name of the emulative art student out of the lists of the paladins into the empyrean of the lost! On the contrary he still finds the best inspiration for his glowing fancy in his inherited wealth of Story. If we would find the secret of this realistic sense that exists within its decorative cadre we may begin by seeking it in Indian literature. *The Mahabharata* contains innumerable instances of this power. The story tells of gods and demi-gods, of warring mortals and celestial idylls, of Religion, Romance and of humble Love. This book is a sparkling fountain of inspiration to the Indian Art student to-day, and as the *same* Spirit of Imaginative Realism enthuses his own, one or two examples will help us to understand *his* work. The story is told that Arjuna (one of the five Pândava Brothers, who were the joint husbands of Draupadi "of faultless features") went into self-inflicted banishment for twelve years. Arjuna is the Launcelot of *The Mahabharata*; he is the great warrior, and at the same time the very human, lovable man. So we are not surprised

THE INDIAN ART STUDENT

to find that though he had taken the vows of Brahmachârya (celibacy) Arjuna's stay in the forests is brightened by the smiles of the lovely Water-Nymph, Ulupi, daughter of the King of Serpents, and by his wedding with the Princess Chitrângadâ. Finally he carries off Subhadrâ, the sister of the mighty Krishna, in Plutonian fashion, and as his exile is now nearly terminated he returns homeward with this bride. The dilemma which faced the hero is thus admirably described,—“The last year of his exile the exalted one passed in the sacred region of Puskara. After the twelve years were complete, he came back to Khândava-prastha. He approached the King (his eldest brother) first and then worshipped the Brâhmanâs with respectful attention. At last the hero went unto Draupadi. Draupadi, from jealousy, spoke unto him, saying,—‘Why tarriest thou here, O son of Kunti? Go where the daughter of the Sâtwata race is! A second tie always relaxeth the first one upon a faggot. . .’ But Arjuna pacified her and repeatedly asked her forgiveness. And returning soon unto where Subhadrâ, attired in red silk, was staying, he sent her into the inner apartments dressed (not as a queen but) in the simple garb of a cowherd woman. But arrived at the palace, the renowned Subhadrâ looked handsomer in that dress. . . . Then that girl of face like the full moon hastily went unto Draupadi



J. H. Arden

STUDY FOR AN APSARÀ.

AS THE SUPERHUMAN REALIST

and worshipped her saying,—‘I am thy maid!’ Draupadi rose hastily and embraced the sister of Krishna from affection, and said,—‘Let thy husband be without a foe!’ Subhadrâ then with a delighted heart said unto Draupadi,—‘So be it!’ From that time, O Janamejaya, those great warriors, the Pândavâs, began to live happily”.¹

The truth and simple humanity which infuse this domestic drama should be compared with the following application of the same perfect power to a still higher theme. Once upon a time two Asurâs or Demons, Sunda and Upasunda, had acquired so much merit by the severity of their asceticism that they threatened the whole Universe. In order to humble their over-weening pride the gods in conclave ordered Viswakarman (the Hephaestus of Indra’s Paradise) to “create a damsel capable of captivating all hearts”. The story is thus continued,—“Created with great care by Viswakarman, the damsel, in beauty, became unrivalled among the women of the three worlds. There was not even a minute part of her body which by its wealth of beauty could not rivet upon it the gaze of beholders. And like unto the embodied Sree herself, that damsel of extraordinary beauty captivated the eyes and hearts of every creature. And because she had been

¹ *Mahabharata*, translated by Pratap Chandra Roy, C.I.E., Section CCXXIII (Haranaharana Parva), p. 426.

THE INDIAN ART STUDENT

created with portions of every gem taken in minute measures, the Grandsire bestowed upon her the name of Tilottamâ. And as soon as she started into life, the damsel bowed to Brahman and with joined hands said,—‘ Lord of every created thing, what task am I to accomplish and what have I been created for ? ’ The Grandsire answered,—‘ Go, O Tilottamâ, unto the Asurâs, Sunda and Upasunda ! O amiable one, tempt them with thy captivating beauty ! And, O damsel, conduct thyself there in such a way that the Asurâ brothers may, in consequence of the wealth of thy beauty, quarrel with each other as soon as they cast their eyes upon thee ’.

“ Bowing unto the Grandsire and saying—‘ So be it ’,—the damsel walked round the celestial conclave. The illustrious Brahman was then sitting with face turned eastwards, and Mahâdeva with face also towards the east, and all the celestials with face northwards, and the Rishis with face towards all directions. While Tilottamâ walked round the conclave of the celestials, Indra and the illustrious Sthânu (Mahâdeva) were the only ones that succeeded in preserving their tranquillity of mind. But exceedingly desirous as Mahâdeva was (of beholding Tilottamâ), when that damsel (in her progress round the celestial conclave) was at his side, another face like a full-blown lotus appeared on the southern side of his

AS THE SUPERHUMAN REALIST

body. And when she was behind him, another face appeared on the west. And when the damsel was on the northern side of the great god, a fourth face appeared on the northern side of his body. Mahâdeva (who was eager to behold the damsel) came also to have a thousand eyes, each large and slightly reddish, before, behind and on his flanks. And it was thus that Sthânu, the great god, came to have four faces, and the slayer of Vala, a thousand eyes. And as regards the mass of the celestials and the Rishis, they turned their faces towards all directions as Tilottamâ walked round them. Excepting the divine Grandsire himself, the glances of those illustrious personages, even of all of them, fell upon Tilottamâ's body. And when Tilottamâ set out (for the city of the Asurâs), beholding the wealth of her beauty, they regarded the task as already accomplished".¹

Was there ever richer or more pregnant word-painting than this? Is it strange that Indian students are fulfilling their innate desire to clothe their imaginative creations with the hues of a verisimilitude which is of the nature of truth? They are right to paint their heroes and heroines, Arjuna, and Draupadi, Râma, and Sitâ, as breathing realities and not as shadowy abstractions. They are true to their type in reclothing the

¹ *Mahabharata*, translated by Pratap Chandra Roy, C.I.E., Section CCXIII (Rajya-labha Parva), p. 412.

THE INDIAN ART STUDENT

fleshless bones of the past with the forms of passionate life. Indian Art is very far from being comprised within a convention, and cannot be obscured by the perfecting of external form. Its revival in all its fullness awaits but the fervid sympathy, support, and help of those whose Faith is BEAUTY.

APPENDIX

THE WOMEN OF THE AJANTA CAVES

Page 27

THE Cave Temples of Ajanta lie some three hundred miles from Bombay in the Dominions of His Exalted Highness the Nizam of Hyderabad. The twenty-nine temples hewn in the " Towering Craggs " were first discovered for the outside world by Huien Thsang, a Chinese Traveller, in the Seventh Century. The Excavators of this Sanctuary were Bhuddists of (probably) the Second and First Centuries B.C. ; the paintings were executed between the First and Seventh Centuries A.D. Thanks to the interest taken in these Caves by His Exalted Highness the Nizam's Government this Sanctuary of Art is under careful preservation, and is ably supervised by an artist-custodian, Mr. Syed Ahmed.

THE WORSHIPPERS OF BEAUTY Page 41

AN Indian friend has drawn my attention to the omission of one interesting ceremony which certainly should not be left out of any account however slight of the Picture Ritual of the Prabhu Women. When a child is born the girls of the house paint a picture on both sides of the bedroom door some three days after the birth of the baby. Both pictures are representations of two Female Deities who are placed there as though to protect the Mother and child. Though this essay has been chiefly concerned with the artistic traits of the Prabhus, that community is at least as celebrated for its learning as for its art. To mention but a few instances, the late Rao Bahadur Vasudev J. Kirtikar was a philosopher (see his *Studies in Vedanta*, edited by Mukund R. Jayakar, M.A., LL.B., Barrister-at-Law); the poetical works of the late Lieutenant-Colonel Kirtikar, I.M.S., are selected as texts for the Bombay University Examinations; while the poems of Mr. Ramrao Balkrishna are widely celebrated in contemporary Marathi literature.

SANCHI—AND THE INDIAN VIEW-POINT IN ART

Page 85

SANCHI, situated in the Dominions of Her Highness the Ruler of Bhopal, was a Seat of Religious learning from the Second Century B.C. to the Fifth Century A.D., and was first a Bhuddist and later a Hindu Centre of Faith. Its resurrection is the work of Sir John Marshall, Director-General of Archæology in India, who stamped the accomplished task with a charm and taste that makes this great work of restoration altogether a thing apart. The ruins are under the sympathetic care of Mr. B. Ghosal of Bhopal.

PÂTHÂRE PRABHU FESTIVALS

THE FESTIVAL OF "MOTHER'S DAY" Page 69

THE Prabhu Festival of the Pithori Holiday (or Mother's Day) is distinct from the comparatively new public holiday (which is also called Mother's Day) copied from America, and annually celebrated about the same date, the 19th of August. The Hindu holiday is probably of very remote origin. It is restricted to Bombay and the Southern region, that is the Konkan or the Districts below the Western Ghats, and is not observed in any other part of India. The Pâthâre Prabhu Caste strictly observes this popular festival, and the ladies of that remarkably artistic community tell the young folks the following circumstances which gave rise to "Mother's Day."

Once upon a time there was a poor woman who was blessed with a child every year ; but it proved no blessing after all, for her baby always died before the year was out. These repeated misfortunes led to her incurring the hatred of her Mother-in-law, who regarded her as a useless and accursed member of the household and who, on the birth of yet another infant, drove the unfortunate Mother from the house. The poor castaway went crying into the forest with her baby clasped to her breast, in all the bitterness of despairing affection. But in the depths of the jungle she met with an Apsarâ (as the beautiful Nymphs of Hindu story are called) who inquired of her the cause of her lamentations. So the woman told her all. The narrative aroused the sympathy of the Nymph, who counselled her to wait where she was, as an opportunity would offer that very night for the amelioration of her grief ; for as it happened there was to be a forest festival of the Immortals at which no fewer than sixty-four "Yoginees" (Female Deities) were to be present. The

poor woman's chance would then come, provided she possessed the courage to speak in the over-aweing presence of the Immortals. Needless to say, the Mother eagerly embraced the opportunity offered to her by the beautiful stranger, who now vanished from her sight. All day she waited with her child, and as the night drew on she heard the roar of the fierce jungle beasts and was minded to fly from the spot. But the Mother's heart resisted all fears; and she was still there at midnight when the Yoginees arrived with their celestial retinue. What a marvellous sight the poor watching Mother looked upon through the branches of the champak tree behind which she had hidden herself! The forest which had been as dark as pitch was now brilliantly lighted by the Celestial beams that surrounded the Yoginees; and she saw those slender-waisted ones disporting themselves on the margin of a pool covered with lotus flowers. But the wonderful vision could not overawe the anxious Mother. She was thinking of her child, suffering under the ban of the same relentless fate which had killed its brothers and sisters. She rushed from her hiding-place into the very centre of those Immortals just as they were on the point of beginning the feast which they had provided in that secluded spot. The Yoginees looked upon the intruder steadfastly, well knowing that a dreadful punishment may overtake the mortal who rashly dares to break in upon the leisure of the gods.

"O, woman," said they, "Art thou the guest?" And trembling the poor woman made answer,—“O, Ye of luminous smiles, I *am* the guest.”

Twice the Yoginees repeated their question; and twice the brave Mother answered, “Yea.”

“Speak!” commanded the Celestial Beauties.

The woman sobbed out her story—and it touched the hearts of all those who heard it.

“Go in peace!” said the Yoginees. “Have no fear for thy child. For know that thy love and faith have saved him. He shall live, and be blessed; but worship thou the Yoginees hereafter upon this the last day of the month of *Shrāvana*.”

APPENDIX

So ever since the Prabhus have obeyed the divine behest and worshipped the merciful Yoginees on their own day as they commanded ; and even to the present time the Mother who wears the sacred robe and waits upon the children, before she confers the Vâyanâs or gifts upon them repeats the question of the Yoginees, " Art thou the guest ? "

If you are specially favoured by Providence so as to have the rare pleasure and good fortune to be admitted into a Home in the Prabhu locality of Bombay on the evening of this festival, you will see the beautiful preparations for the family celebrations. All day the lady of the house, who is the leading figure on this occasion, has been busy cooking the delicious sweetmeats which are exhibited before the altar which she has erected in honour of the Yoginees. She has had to paint with her own hand on a scarlet seat, or " pâta " as it is called, a very delicate and finely executed picture of the sixty-four Yoginees in conventional form. They are all there, painted in sandal-paste in pale yellow on the board that leans against the wall of the reception-room, decorated with a profusion of garlands. Two bunches of green coco-nuts flank the pâta, on either side ; none of the nuts have been broken off, for the clusters must be complete. On the right-hand side is a standing lamp with seven wicks, and at the foot of the pâta is a pile of fruit of every kind in season. There are oranges, plantains (red and yellow), limes, apples ; and (placed at the sides) several of the large round green " citrus decumana " fruits which the Hindus call " papanus." In front of these offerings she arranges on a long plantain-leaf a variety of sweetmeats ; there are in all thirty kinds or more—all made by her own hands—but some of these are spread upon small four-legged stools, to right and left, and some placed in small receptacles on brass and silver trays. There are two large lamps on either side ; and three very small ones fed with ghee are set within the range of the main group. A brass lota is a noticeable object in the foreground, and beside it a silver cup and basin with a " pali " or Indian spoon. This basin is called a " tâhman," and is on certain other occasions but not on the present one

APPENDIX

utilised to hold another kind of ritual picture painted by the Prabhu ladies.

These groups of offerings are all arranged within the confines of a "rângoli" or sand-picture which the Mother has herself drawn upon the floor with white sand and coloured powders manipulated with her fingers and not with a brush. The design, about 5 feet square, is enclosed within a red and white border. Each section of the square contains the drawing of a gateway, and the corners are filled in with clusters of grapes and vine leaves. The centre, which, of course, we cannot see, is (we are told) occupied by sacred symbols, prominent among which is the swastika. When the offering is complete, by which time the fumes of the joss-sticks or "agarbattis" have perfumed the whole room, the Mother takes her place on the seat or "pâta" which is placed in front of all these objects. She has fasted all day and will not be at liberty to partake of food until after the children have had their meal. She is dressed in the sacred cloth, a gorgeous saree of flame-coloured silk, and must touch no one, while so clad, being dedicated to the service of the Yoginees. For this reason also she takes no notice of the guests as they enter, intent upon her long-drawn-out task of arranging her offering of sweetmeats and fruits to the best advantage, and of adoring the sacred painting of the goddesses.

Now the children enter the room one by one. First comes the baby of the family, the child of a young woman who was married in this very house only ten months before. This mite is carried before the shrine, and the Mother, while she bears on her head a tray with fruits and flowers, takes rice from the basin before her and places it in the little one's hand. Then comes the daughter of the house, a beautiful girl in a diaphanous saree of pale salmon-pink with a circlet of mogrâ flowers in the coil of her magnificent hair, and the eyes and shy manner of a gazelle. Of her the Mother asks the usual formula, "Art thou the guest?"

"Yea!" she replies, "I am the guest." So she receives the emblematic gift.

This maiden has other duties, however, to perform, one of

APPENDIX

which is a very pretty one. As the young men of the family come forward in turn to take the gift from the Mother it is she who places on the forehead of each the auspicious red, "kunkum," mark. Fortunately she does not disappear altogether from the scene. We may see her occasionally crossing the room to the dining-room where she is helping with the preparations for the forthcoming feast ; or catch a glimpse of her in the inner room where the women's apartments are, moving like a timid sunbeam among the shadows ; a beautiful, elusive, and remote personality. The religious part of the ceremonies is concluded by the Mother rising from her seat and surrendering it to the oldest female in the family, an aged lady, from whose hand she herself receives the "Vâyana."

But this does not signify that the Mother's long day of fasting and work for the well-being of her family is yet at an end. She now proceeds to minister to the men. No other hand but hers serves the food which she has prepared for this dinner. Some six or seven of the menfolk of the family and their guests are seated side by side round the dining-room, each on their respective "pâta" (round which the Mother has drawn a decorative border in colours upon the floor), which is raised about an inch and a half from the ground. One large plantain-leaf is placed in front of each guest. The ingredients of the feast are laid out in separate portions upon the leaves and are conveyed to the mouth not by forks and spoons but by the fingers of the right hand, which alone is used in the process of eating. The guests do not speak much, but pay full attention to the dinner. The variety of the viands and different flavours (to the privileged European guest at any rate) are as novel as they are delicious and make the banquet a very memorable one. He will have difficulty in giving names to the things he eats but none at all in dealing with them. The *pièce de résistance* may well seem to him to be a small basin containing a curd-like substance composed of milk, rice, sugar, almonds, saffron, cardamons, and "pistas." It is called "kheer" or "doodh pak" in Marathi. But whether he really prefers this nectar of the gods to another

APPENDIX

exquisite attraction he will find it difficult to say. This irresistible delicacy is called "panchâmrit" and is made of a composition of dates, chilis, cinnamon, etc.

These are only two of the items of the banquet with which the hostess who passes to and fro almost continuously replenishes the diminishing portions of the guests. Among the other viands are a soup-like potion (a preparation of cucumber), a thick curry made of water-lilies ("alu" leaves) and a silvery preparation of fascinating flavour.

But if after the sumptuous meal the alien guest feels inclined to imagine that the culinary triumphs of the occasion are the main feature of the festival, he need but look from the windows of the house Eastward and Westward ; from the first he will see, through the open window of the neighbouring Prabhu home, the brilliant illumination which proceeds from the shrine, and falls on the bent head and silken saree of a young Mother who is adoring those bewilderingly fair Yoginees whose symbols she has herself painted ; while from the other he will look down on a similar scene, but this time it is a wondering group of children that comes within his field of vision, outlined against the sacred lights of the hidden altar.

THE FESTIVAL OF THE ELEPHANT-HEADED GOD

Page 71

ON the day previous to the Chaturthi, which means the 4th of Bhâdrapada (August), a special bazaar consisting of thousands of images of Ganpati is held in Bombay and—to a larger or smaller extent—in many parts of the Bombay Presidency. Sometimes when a special image has to be prepared, orders are given by the family explaining to the Modellers the special customs and wishes of the household. On the third evening and early in the morning of the fourth day of Bhâdrapada the streets in the Indian Sections of the City of Bombay are crowded with people, men, women, and children, bringing Ganpati to their houses with all ceremony, and with singing and music. Some of the images are carried on the heads, others in palanquins, and (curious innovation) by the prosaic method of the motor-car !

After the image has reached the home, it is seated on the front verandah facing the doorway of the house with a “ Rângoli ” or coloured picture drawn round the part on which it is placed.

The Mother of the house coming forward with a “ panchârti ” in her hand, waves the lamps before the image, which is then lifted and installed upon the throne in the room where the worship is to be performed.

The painted image of Ganpati (Ganesh) with its Elephant's head forms the central feature of a specially erected altar backed by a mirror upon the wall which is draped with curtains of gold brocade. The image rests upon a silver “ chawrang ” on which is also a silver saucer, which contains a very small brass replica of the same deity. Every morning this miniature is given a bath in a “ tâhman ” (dish) in milk, curds, honey, sugar, and ghee. In reality the larger image ought to be given this bath—but as it is of clay and beautifully painted it is not sacrificed in this way.

On the altar in front of the “ chawrang ” or throne on which

APPENDIX

Ganpati is seated are a number of lamps of ghee (tiny receptacles) and a bowl of flowers. On either side of the image stands a vase of flowers, and an arch of Jasmine is erected over it. On a lower tier of the altar along with the usual floral decorations are masses of fruit, coco-nuts, plantains, limes, oranges, etc. The peculiarity of this offering is that each fruit is marked with sandal-paste—a mark to register it as an offering to the god. There is a shell on this shelf called “shankh” from which water is sprinkled upon the image. It is a sacred shell—like the conch—which is used by the gods as a horn.

Two large lamps stand on either side of the altar, and below, a lota, with water for worship, and a “tâhman,” cup, and “pali.” There is also a plate containing a “panchârti” (or five-wicked lamp) and a small spoon for burning camphor. On the other side are the ingredients for bathing the image, a bell, which is constantly sounded while the worship is in progress, a basin for sandal-paste, a small lota used as a shower bath, and a “chaw-fullâ” containing the five pigments—used for marking the sacred mark upon the forehead, red, yellow, chrome, black, and orange. There is also an abundant mass of flowers upon this tray.

Ganpati is said to like green turf (Durwa), and so the Brahmin Priest when he comes to officiate will make an offering of turf, and as the god has an elephant’s head he is likely to enjoy eating the green verdure.

Around all this is drawn a “Rângoli” or sand-picture. It consists of a red and white border with a conventional form of the bell leaf and flower on a ground prepared with cow-dung. A Swastika is drawn in the centre with a gateway in front. Flowers are strewn along the line in the foreground of the picture. A standing brass lamp containing coco-nut oil on one side of the altar is used for purposes of worship. It is sometimes duplicated upon the other side also.

Only the male members of the family worship the god—the women’s assistance in the ceremony is limited to these paintings and decorations, which are entirely carried out by them.

APPENDIX

In the morning after the ceremony of bathing Ganpati, which is usually accomplished by the son of the house, some dishes of sweetmeats, etc., are placed before the image in a plate around which water is sprinkled, and a leaf of the Tulsi plant is woven round the plate. This leaf is placed at the feet of the image to signify that the ingredients of the meal contained by this dish are sacred to the god. Then it is removed, and its contents eaten by the worshipper.

The evening worship and the ceremony of the bath are the same as the morning ceremonies; but the eatables consist only of a few sweets. After these sweets are placed before Ganpati, a "panchârti" is lighted and songs in praise of the deity are sung by the guests and their host.

At the conclusion of the festival (which some families maintain for a day and a half, others for five days, while a third party observe it for ten days) after the recitation of prayers and the singing of songs, the image is lifted up and replaced by one of the worshippers. It is then carried out to the verandah and this time Ganpati is placed facing the street. It is again the duty of the Mother of the family to come out and wave the "panchârti" and also to place some packets of sweets by the side of the image. When this has been done, she asks the members of the house to lift it and exhorts them to shout "Morya!" On his departure the deity is carried by the same method by which he was brought home. The male members and the children of the family accompany the image. All the way to the sea, which is the objective of the party, the cry of "Morya" is continuously kept up. The god is thus escorted to the beach at Chowpatty. There the host takes the image and holding it in both hands dips it three times, then abandons it in the sea. He and his party are sometimes immersed up to the neck in the water. Until Ganpati is finally submerged, the worshippers continue to shout, "Bapa, Morya!" that is, "Father, Come again!"





THE IMAGE OF GAURI ENTHRONED IN A HINDU HOME

To face p 139

GAURI (the image of balsam leaves) is seated in an arm-chair with her elbows resting on the arms of the chair. On her head is a wreath of roses, jasmine and other flowers. Indeed flowers are heaped on Gauri's head from morning to evening. Her face is made of paper and beautifully painted. Sometimes the Image has a head modelled in clay, or of brass or silver. In the latter case it is a much smaller affair. The robe that drapes the balsam is the usual Mahratta saree, but it must be of silk. The ornaments are imitations of those of the Prabhu ladies. The hands which are cut out of paper are painted with "kunkum"—i.e. the nails are coloured red. On either side of the image are brass or silver "lotâs" containing water and supporting a coconut. These lotâs are placed on a heap of rice. In front of Gauri about as high as her knees is the usual offering of fruit, and the small ghee lamps ranged along the "chawrang" on which the fruit is piled are also customary accessories as in all these ceremonies. Lamps and flowers are set out on the floor, and, as at the Ganpati festival, a "Rângoli" is drawn as the foundation for the whole. At the left-hand corner of the "Rângoli" is a tray containing the articles of worship and at the opposite corner another tray with a "panchârti." In the centre is a silver cup with "pali" and saucer, and behind it a "pamandalu" for carrying water. The "Rângoli" itself (on the occasion when I was present) was a representation of a flowering creeper with a doorway in the centre. It was surrounded by actual flowers and green leaves laid out on the floor in patterns.

But the most striking feature of the whole scene was the beautiful background for Gauri. This consisted of a panel painted on the white wall, which together with its stencilled decorative border measured about 5 feet in height and 4 feet

APPENDIX

in breadth. It was lit by eleven electric bulbs affixed to the wall as well as by the lamps in front. This panel was painted by the lady of the house and her daughter with representations of all the furniture, ornaments, and utensils of the Prabhu household with some of the surroundings—a well, a temple, a pedestal for the tulsi plant, and a kitchen.

The stencilled border consisted of flowers. The panel itself contained a pictorial chart, a bedroom, a writing-room, an inkpot surrounded by flowers, two standing lamps, hanging lamps (the latest, modern unfortunately !) and curtains. There was the temple of Shiva (always painted in the left-hand bottom corner) and a well, and bathing articles in the right-hand bottom corner. All these articles were drawn without any cast shadows, in natural colours and excellent perspective. They were small and beautifully finished. I noticed among the other objects portrayed an admirably drawn carriage, and a “songati” and “pat,” i.e. dice and board for the Indian game which is said to be the same as that played by the Pândava brothers when they gambled away the Empire of the World.

This worship is observed by the women and girls only. Its object is to give them the long companionship of their husbands, that this may not be severed early by death.

Thus in the centre of the panel they paint an emblematical design containing ten squares. On referring to a very old and highly cultured Prabhu lady I was told that this emblem represents the hearts of both husband and wife ; it is generally termed in Marathi “khola”. Below this emblem a palanquin is painted, which signifies a conveyance that shall carry husband and wife together throughout the journey of life.

The most charming things I saw on this occasion were the footprints of Gauri. These marks (in sandal-paste) on the stone floor led from the verandah up the staircase and through all the rooms and quarters of the house. One followed wonderingly these marks of little bare feet—a child’s feet—tracing them in all directions, and finally led by them directly to the altar itself.

APPENDIX

The way these footprints are made is as simple as it is ingenious. The daughter of the house showed me the method. She dips the edge of her clenched hands in a tray of sandal paste and makes a single dab with both together on the floor, one hand a little behind the other. These marks look like those of the soles of a foot. Then she makes with her ten fingers the marks of the toes. It is all done with swift certainty : a dab of the hands, then a pressure of the finger-tips, and the footprints are there. One imagines the child goddess pattering about the house—an invisible, beautiful Presence !

THE "RÂNGOLI" PICTURES

Pages 104, 105, 106 and 107

THE diagrams illustrating this volume form central features of the "Rângoli" drawings. These are filled in with beautiful tints mixed and graduated according to the fancy of the artist, and surrounded by highly original decorative details of flowers, fruits, birds, animals, or figures, treated conventionally or realistically. I have been so fortunate as to have had opportunities of visiting some of the Hindu localities of Bombay during the Divali Holidays, when the drawing of the "Rângolis" was in full swing, and among the scores of pictures I saw, no two were the same, although the subjects treated had to be identical. Little girls of four or five years old were busy upon their own tiny "Rângolis," sitting beside their elder sisters who were engaged on their larger works; even these mites were trying to design as well as to utilise the traditional pattern for that particular day. A tendency to substitute for these geometrical forms illustrations of the same subject in a modern manner is to be seen in some instances. But the ancient methods of design are far more beautiful. It should be borne in mind that these pictures are *painted*. The prepared surface of cow-dung is moistened, and the colours are mixed and rubbed in as a pigment with the fingers. The process is nearer to painting than to pastel. The art of the "Rângoli" in one form or another is more or less general among the Hindus, and, according to my information, there are parts of Gujarat where the "Rângoli" pictures are still to be found in a state of excellence.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY UNWIN BROTHERS, LIMITED
PRINTERS, LONDON AND WOKING

Col-
N 16/10/75

Central Archaeological Library,

NEW DELHI

23023

Call No. 701.180 954 / Sol

Author—Solomon W. E. G.

The Charam of Indi-

"A book that is shut is but a block"

CENTRAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL LIBRARY
GOVT. OF INDIA
Department of Archaeology
NEW DELHI

Please help us to keep the book
clean and moving.